COMMONWEAL

$2.00 February 23, 1996

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HARD ALLEVA on 'Dead Man Walking'

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VRENCE S. CUNNINGHAM:

igion booknotes

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To the Editors

Blaming the pope

I respond to your editorial, "Responsum dubium" [December 1, 1995], in the light of a moving passage from Paul's letter to the Colossians, heard recently at Mass: "Because you are God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with heartfelt mercy, with kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another; forgive whatever grievances you have against one another."

With that in mind, I want to put several hard questions:

Is the issue of the ordination of women so central to the practice of the faith as to warrant "a gnawing reservation and a germ of cynicism" in the hearts of those who object to the recent definitive (?) infallible (?) declarations by the pope and Cardinal Ratzinger?

Is this question really so important to one's faith as to prevent anyone from carrying out with a fullness of spirit a ministry of teaching in Catholic inner-city schools, or of serving those sick and dying with AIDS, or of praying in monasteries and convents, or of doing any of the 9 million other wonderful things carried out under the aegis of our church?

Is it *Commonweal*'s message that if the wonderful leaders of our wonderful church are too benighted to see the truth on this issue, then many will logically, even understandably, dissassociate themselves from this awful church—or stay faithful to it, but only work within its confines with reservations and a growing cynicism?

If you are correct about this, isn't it incumbent on you to admonish with love those Catholics tempted by such attitudes at least as much as you admonish those church leaders to whom you seem to assign sole blame for inflicting wounds on the body of Christ?

I turn back to the message of Paul, hoping that I speak in its spirit: "Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you. Over all these virtues put on love, which binds the rest together and makes them perfect....Whatever you do in speech or in action, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. Give thanks to God the Father through him."

LAWRENCE D. HOGAN
Fanwood, N.J.

"Catholicism & Popular Culture," *Commonweal*'s September 22, 1995, issue was so popular that we have run out of copies. If you have extras or can spare your own copy, please return it (them) to us. We would be happy to reimburse you for postage. Please send to *Commonweal*, 15 Dutch Street, Room 502, New York, NY 10038. Thank you.

No mystery here

I could not agree more with David R. Carlin, Jr. ["Ordaining Women Is Rational," January 12], when he writes that religion without *mysterium tremendum* has little to do with real religion. But what constitutes mystery? What has to be understood simply as God's will?

I would suggest that mystery is that which is not explicable in human terms—that which is not irrational but supra-rational, about which we cannot say why. Thus there are three persons in one God because there are three persons in one God; the Son of God became man because the Son of God became man; the bread and wine at Mass become the body and blood of Jesus Christ because Christ said they would.

But that women were not ordained priests in the ancient Middle East is readily explained by human history, by human attitudes and acts. Christ's church would never have got off the ground had it gone so counter to the patriarchal assumptions of that time and place—or just about any other time and place until the here and now. In its beginnings Christ's church made no attempt to end slavery, yet its principle required that slavery ultimately end, and that women enjoy full equality. See Saint Paul in Galatians and elsewhere: In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female.

And if Christians did not begin immediately to carry that principle to its logical conclusions, they did start the process. Saint Paul in Ephesians—one of his less revolutionary epistles—may indeed admonish women to obey their husbands, but he also orders men to love their wives and to treat their children gently, as persons, not as property. If Paul does not demand that Christians free their slaves, he does in the Epistle to Philemon urge a man to treat the runaway slave who is returning to him not as chattel but as a brother in Christ.

It takes an appallingly long time for ingrained habits fully to change, but for 2,000 years Christianity, when it has been true to itself, has been the leaven that leads to what frees.

MARIAN BURKHART
New York, N.Y.

A two-way choice

Re: David R. Carlin, Jr.'s witty and much-appreciated column, it seems appropriate to mention that William Ewer's lines ("How odd/of God/to choose/the Jews") drew a retort from Rabbi Lewis Browne: "But not so odd/as those who choose/a Jewish God/yet spurn the Jews," adding: "It's not so odd/the Jews chose God." The point: Jews are not chosen by birthright in the same way that a person born in the United States is automatically an American citizen. Election is conditional: To be chosen, a Jew must keep the Covenant holy. No rights without duties.

Otherwise, I wholeheartedly agree with Carlin that God should have made the Greeks his chosen people,

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COMMONWEAL

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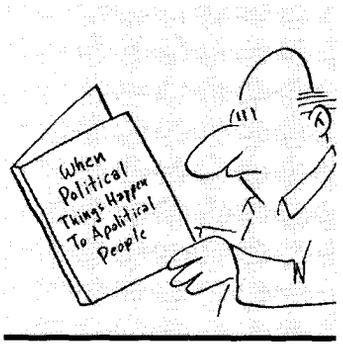

A capitalist society depends on noncapitalist values in order to hold together and prosper. If Newt Gingrich and his allies think America's problem is government, they misunderstand the past and misread the future. 11

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given their sense of fun. ELLA KRUSE
Las Cruces, N. Mex.

Ask the lawgiver

Why is it that I am not surprised by the response of *Commonweal*'s readers to the statement by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith that the church has no power to ordain women to the priesthood?

The adage in law is that only the lawgiver can tell us what he meant when he promulgated the law. The pope clarified this issue through a special declaration personally approved by him: When he promulgated *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* he intended to say that it is irreformable doctrine that the church has received no power from Christ to ordain women to the priesthood. It is not up to *Commonweal*'s editors or commentators to set up the parameters of how, when, and in what manner the pope declares himself. That is entirely up to the bishop of Rome. There should be no further doubt in anyone's mind. In this case, unlike the case of Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors*, the lawmaker in *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* has interpreted his own law.

But, ask some *Commonweal* Catholics, is this teaching really there in Scripture and tradition through the ages? We are here at the rock bottom question of authority in the church: Who has the right and power to discern and declare this to be so *vel non*? The Catholic church says the power resides in the believing people generally but specifically in the college of bishops; and the bishop of Rome may speak authoritatively for that body as well as by his own proper authority. Reformist Catholics who say the authority resides in the whole believing people of which the body of bishops is only one part are very close to Protestant ecclesiology.

For loyal Catholics the controversy over women's ordination is ended. No more evasions or nuances or other arguments by theologians or reformist Catholics. They now have only two choices: to remain as loyal Catholics or to join another Christian communion more in keeping with their ecclesiology. There is no other choice.

PETER J. RIGA
Houston, Tex.

The primacy of insight

In his commentary on the women's ordination question ["Responses to Rome," January 26], Michael Novak claims to be "struck" by appeals from "progressives" to "the spirit of Vatican II," and recalls from his own experience "painstaking arguments over the letter of Vatican II." He implies that it is somehow incredible and, worse, unfaithful, to suspect that the spirit of the council may have been betrayed by reliance on "precisely worded documents."

This possibility might seem less unlikely if we spoke of the council's insight rather than its spirit and if we recalled these especially useful observations written at the close of the council's second session:

"The characteristic of the closed church of the last several generations has not been attention to insight; it has been admiration for certain conceptions, which have emerged in one culture and indeed in one school of thought. Even there, instead of fixing attention on the insights generated by this school of thought, the masters of that school have concentrated on the formulae, the words, the conceptions....

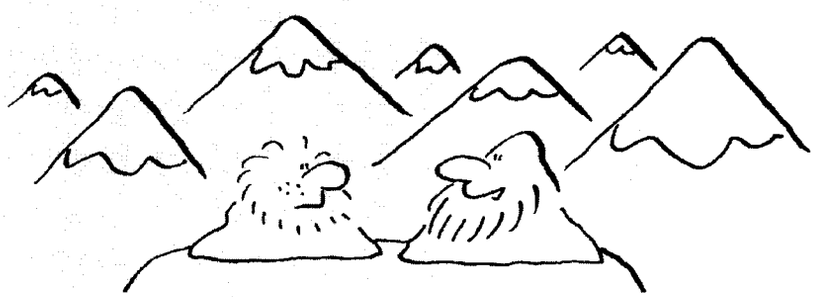
"The isolation of this school has thus been twofold. One wall has separated it from appreciation of the insights of other cultures and other schools of thought. A second wall has separated it...from its own insights, by focusing attention, instead, on its fixed notions and its system of such notions...."

Why is this a failure? The writer puts it clearly: "To prefer conceptions to insights is to prefer second things to first, the product to its source, the letter to its living spirit."

What then might be the basic insight—the *spirit*—of Vatican II which occasions today's "increasingly frequent appeals on the part of progressives"? The writer suggests an answer:

"[T]he vision of an open church in an open society, as a new achievement of men [*sic*] in their pilgrimage through history," a church in which those "who before were pusillanimous are doing great deeds and dreaming great visions," in which "old patterns are dissolving," in which "the Spirit's activity is almost tangible," in which those who are faithful to understanding see possibilities hidden for centuries, and act upon them."

The observer who wrote those lines was Michael Novak (*The Open Church*, Macmillan, 1964). DAVID CUSHING
Waterloo, Iowa



"We'll start you out on conventional wisdom."

Free at last!

It was in 1959 that I as a first-grade schoolgirl first learned that God "be-

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Two families

Last month's two-hour "Frontline" (PBS) documentary, "Murder on 'Abortion Row,'" was a powerful presentation of yet another chapter in the nation's anguished struggle over abortion. The program aired just as the trial of twenty-three-year-old John Salvi III opened in Massachusetts Superior Court. Salvi is on trial for the murder in December 1994 of two women's health-clinic receptionists in Brookline.

Of particular interest to Catholics was the documentary's pairing of the lives of Mr. Salvi and one of the victims, Shannon Lowney (twenty-five). Both were raised in observant Catholic families. Salvi had been an altar boy and his mother the parish choir leader. Lowney (a 1991 Boston College graduate) had worked in a Jesuit-sponsored program serving the poor in Ecuador.

"Frontline" also contrasts the responses of various Catholics and former Catholics to the tragic events. The film has been criticized by some mainline prolife activists (*see* box) who feel their views were not adequately represented; and by the conservative Catholic Campaign for America, which argued that the program portrayed the Catholic church "as inciting the events in Brookline."

It is hard to imagine how *any* program on abortion would satisfy all viewers. But given the generally less-than-balanced state of reporting on the subject, and in particular coverage of the complexities of the religiously inspired anti-abortion protest movement, "Murder" seemed uncommonly textured. The Catholic Campaign simply got it wrong when its press release declared that the program "overtly attributes the murder of an abortion clinic receptionist to the deranged killer's Catholic beliefs." "Murder on 'Abortion Row'" makes no such claim.

That Mr. Salvi suffered(s) from mental instability seems to be the inescapable conclusion to be drawn from the program. It is this delusional dimension, not his Catholic upbringing, that drove Salvi to act as he did. When a defense psychiatrist pointedly asks Salvi whether he supports actions such as Paul Hill's July 1994 murder of a doctor and a security guard at a Florida abortion clinic, Salvi replies, "Does the pope support it?" Here the documentary might have quoted the pope directly in condemning such violence, but chose to turn to Boston's Cardinal Bernard Law for a response. Cardinal Law is presented throughout the program as a principled foe of abortion, but also as a humane, reasonable, and compassionate leader. "I think what we have [here] is a person who decided to do something which is wrong," the cardinal says of Salvi, "in a very misguided way because of something that is good—and that is the defense of human life." Does Salvi's misguided decision mean the prolife movement is to blame? "I don't think anyone could rationally say that," the cardinal answers.

But immediately an apparently disinterested intellectual is called on to question the cardinal's conclusion. Mary Daly, a one-time Catholic theologian and still a professor at Boston College (Ms. Lowney attended one of her courses in 1989), says that Salvi and Law "are on a continuum." It is a stunning moment of revelation about Ms. Daly, for she makes her unsupportable statement with utter self-assurance, totally oblivious of her own biases.

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Yet Ms. Daly's blithe commentary is but another facet of the documentary that makes it so instructive. The Catholic position on abortion is not so monolithic as to exclude debate on, for example, the point in the developmental process when personhood begins. And, as reported in "Murder," even hierarchs can and do disagree on tactical approaches to the political issues involved. Cardinal Law's decision after the murders to call for a moratorium on anti-abortion demonstrations met with resistance not only from some members of the local church and some parts of the Boston prolife movement, but from Cardinal O'Connor of New York.

Without doubt, however, the most telling virtue of the film derives from its portraits of the radiant Ms. Lowney, the troubled Mr. Salvi, their families, and the sorrow that will eternally link them.

The Lowneys seem to have everything going for them. They are an American Catholic success story: well-educated, attractive, accomplished. There is something admirable, almost golden about each member of the family. Then a bullet shatters their lives. Shannon's beloved grandfather, informed of her murder, dies from a broken heart twelve hours later.

And the Salvis—their only and well-loved child now on trial for murder—bear an enormous burden of their own. Within the grand drama of America's abortion issue, the Salvis' is another fateful story. "Murder on 'Abortion Row'" allows the viewer to see to the heart of their painful circumstance. In the picture of their suffering, unforgettably captured here and heightened by Mr. and Mrs. Salvi's grief (not only for their son and for their own failures, but for the victims and their families), we come face-to-face with the consequences of violence and the inviolability of each human life.

ET CETERA

MORE SINISTER THAN FLUORIDATION ■ The most popular film at this year's prestigious Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah, was *Care of the Spitfire Grill*, a drama about spiritual redemption in a small Maine town starring Ellen Burstyn. Caryn James, movie reviewer for the *New York Times*, found something else about the movie equally newsworthy: It was produced by a group named Gregory Productions, owned by the Priests of the Sacred Heart. In an article ("Film Financed by a Religious Group," February 3, 1996) whose tone ran the gamut of emotions from apprehension to incredulity, James alerted *Times* readers to the self-evident dangers. "Some executives in Hollywood are uneasy...those who were troubled by the backers would not speak for the record," James writes. A "religious agenda" is detected by other Hollywood adepts. One potential distributor of the film described how his "jaw dropped" and "a slight chill" went through him when he learned the religious identity of the producers. Recovering quickly, however, the distributor goes on to comment on how "the movie's spiritual content could be a marketing asset."

That's the spirit.

What diabolical agenda are the producers of *Care of the Spitfire Grill* trying to foist on an unsuspecting American public? According to the Gregory group's mission statement, the aim is to make quality movies that reflect "the values of the Judeo-Christian tradition, in particular, love of and reverence for God."

Imagine.

Not only that, but *Care of the Spitfire Grill* depicts Protestant characters and had a Jewish director. It's enough to make your jaw drop.

Where 'Frontline' Failed

Excerpt from letter to David Fanning, Executive Producer, "Frontline," WGBH, February 9, 1996.

...As women who have served for many years, and who continue to serve, in leadership positions in the prolife movement in Massachusetts, each of us was approached by the producers of "Frontline" after the clinic murders in...Brookline. We were individually assured that the goal of the program would be to explore the aftermath of the murders and to delve into the abortion issue in a thoughtful, sensitive way rather than the superficial, stereotypical treatment that it so often receives in the media. We felt that this was a tremendous opportunity to engage, on camera, in the civil dialogue called for in the wake of the murder by Cardinal Law, Governor Weld, and others. Each of us spent several hours with the producers, including lengthy filming sessions. We were stunned to find that absolutely none of our comments was found worthy to be part of the program. Since we collectively represent the vast majority of those committed to the prolife effort in Massachusetts, it is truly extraordinary that not one word any of us said is reported.

Rather "Frontline" treats us to the venomous and grossly antilife rhetoric of Rev. Donald Spitz who is not even from Massachusetts. In attempting to understand the coverage of people who hate, like Donald Spitz, and the total lack of coverage of the mainstream prolife position, we have come to the inevitable conclusion that three professional prolife women leaders speaking on the issue did not satisfy "Frontline's" evident need to depict the prolife position almost entirely through the narrow and skewed lenses of angry, militant male images. So much for any hope of a thoughtful and balanced portrayal of prolife and abortion-rights supporters coming to grips with one of the most compelling human rights issues of our day....

Barbara S. Thorp, Director, Pro-Life Office, Archdiocese of Boston; Frances X. Hogan, President, Women Affirming Life; Madeline McComish, President, Massachusetts Citizens for Life.

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LIZ McCLOSKEY

PERSPECTIVE ON WELFARE

Nobody goes it alone

For reasons that may seem far removed from politics (and maybe a little convoluted) I find myself beginning 1996 with a fresh perspective on last year's efforts to end the welfare system as we know it.

For my family, 1995 was a frenzied year. We sold our house in the Washington area, moved to Saint Louis, Missouri, and then, six months later, returned to the Washington suburbs. During some of those months, my husband spent most of his time in D.C., leaving me with two small, confused boys, a full-time/part-time job launching a new nonprofit organization, and, for a time, no babysitter, few friends, and no family.

So when we returned to home base at summer's end, we went on a rampage to create order and predictability in our lives and in our new home. At a store that sells only things to put other things in or on, we spent more than our accumulated library fines (no small sum). We created antichaos systems—for mail, keys, change, toys, socks, catalogues, receipts. There would be no more unpaid bills, lost documents, moldy tea cups. Peace, said Augustine, is the tranquillity of order. We would fight for it.

And now, peace (of a kind) is at hand (at least for me). Not because I won the war; rather because I surrendered to the knowledge (a) that the gene for ordered living is missing from my DNA; and (b) that my effort to nurture it into existence had left me totally exhausted. This revelation came to me around Thanksgiving time, when I was to meet my closest woman friend, home for the weekend, but couldn't find my car keys, which were supposed to be in the heart-shaped locket hanging on a wall. I recalled a past era when I would have mystically accepted my lot: My keys are lost, and it is O.K.

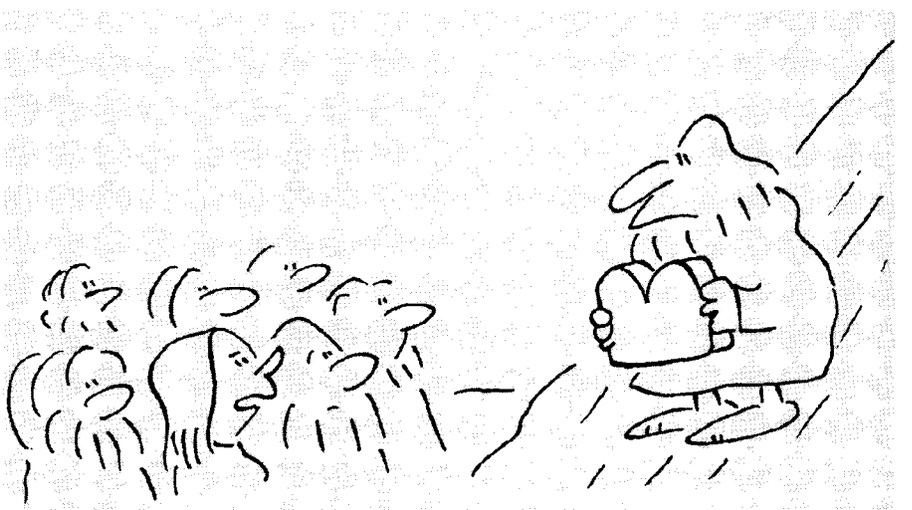
This is called perspective, and I find that it reaches far past my efforts to control the details of my personal and family life. Though I'm blessed with happy relationships, sufficient resources, good health, good humor, I'll always find it hard to live life skillfully and gracefully. It struck me: What's it like for a woman who never misplaces her keys but who—for reasons outside her reach—has lost her job, her spouse, her health insurance, and may soon lose her home?

I can imagine. It appears that some welfare reformers can't. They seem to believe that all such a woman needs to get her life together is a little self-discipline and a deadline. The rhetoric surrounding what was at one point called the "Family Self-Sufficiency Act of 1995" has centered so exclusively on personal responsibility that we get no reminders of the context, the circumstances in which we all live.

Even in the heat of my personal organizational battle, I found that unforeseen circumstances often prevailed. For years we have hopped in the car and driven to the mountains with nary a mishap. Our new planning mode, though, prompted us to get an oil change and new tires, and to make sure we had a current AAA membership, a working flashlight, and a usable car phone before taking our two-hour drive. Not far into the trip we hit a huge pothole that destroyed a tire. A disaster, yes. But we still had the car phone.

Now let's take this woman who has lost job, spouse, and health insurance. Let's give her three kids. Let's say she's determined to take control of her life and has spent the past five years doing so. After lucking into a job-training program that provided day care, she's finding there aren't many jobs that match her new skills, and the few places that are hiring are distant, don't want workers with children, and don't pay all that much. Though she has no use for a car phone, she has to have carfare; but there is no welfare check, the rent is overdue, and her youngest may be getting the flu.

If last year's efforts to reform welfare had succeeded, this fictional (but true-to-life) woman would be one of the many whose time ran out. Both the House and Senate versions of welfare reform put a five-year lifetime limit on welfare benefits. An aspect of the legislative debate that fascinated me was the wrangle between House and Senate over the proportion of families that states could exempt from this five-year limit. The House majority wanted to let the states



"No provision for day care, eh?"

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exempt up to 15 percent of welfare families from this deadline, the Senate preferred 20 percent.

Nice, hard numbers, useful for determining exactly how to distinguish the deserving from the nondeserving poor, without the trouble of inquiring into questions of context: individual circumstances, local or regional unemployment rates, the availability of adequate-to-decent housing, health care, child care, transportation, targeted job training, etc. The premise is that climbing out of poverty is a matter only of determination and energy, and that a deadline will provide them.

Well, it won't. I don't question that there are deliberate welfare cheats, nor that some teen-agers conceive children with no thought of how to care for them, nor that the welfare system can foster dependency. But I have overwhelming doubts that "family self-sufficiency" can be created by punitive decree—or that it can be created at all. Neither I nor my family is self-sufficient. Neither are the families of ardent, earnest, true-believing legislators. No doubt they're all responsible, hard-working, focused—and virtually all of them have been nudged, pushed, pulled, or otherwise moved toward solvency and achievement by resources other than their own, resources mostly denied to welfare beneficiaries they are all too ready to condemn: resources of family, friends, neighbors, schools, counselors, role models, loan officers, medical caregivers....None of them, none of us, is self-sufficient. We all live in a context.

A constructive welfare debate might well assume the necessity of some kind of deadline. It may consider that government programs are not the only and may not be the most effective tools for changing lives. But it should also rest on a consensus that a person who wants to get off welfare needs determination and energy—and a secure job, a living wage, a safe home, reason to hope and therefore to strive. Unfortunately, politics as we know it may preclude any such reasonable approach to ending welfare as we know it.

Poor politicians. They have no control over the circumstances that force them to act this way. It is up to us to understand their problem, to require self-discipline of them, and help change the context of their jobs. □

OF SEVERAL MINDS

ABIGAIL McCARTHY

THE MEDIA VS. THE PEOPLE

Please tell us what we need to know

Should I continue to boil my water? I haven't been able to find the answer in my community newspaper, the *Washington Post*. Some months ago a story about the bacteria in our drinking water caught my eye. There were problems at the treatment plant, it reported. Bacteria had been allowed to accumulate in the holding tanks, as far as I could understand it, and they were being flushed out. But not to worry—it was not a "boil-water emergency." Having experienced several "boil-water emergencies" in the last two years, I nevertheless began boiling water to fill the ice cube trays and cook vegetables. (I had long ago taken to drinking bottled water.)

Weeks passed and I saw no further news about the water. Then on December 19, 1995, an article appeared in Section E, not exactly the important news section of the paper. A coalition of environmental and health groups had reported that tap water in our area posed a health risk that should be investigated by the Environmental Protection Agency. The chief of the agency running the water-treatment plants countered that the coalition's report was "a compilation of facts, near-facts, and absolutely incorrect data" and that "there is an attempt to frighten the public unnecessarily."

The rest of the story is a tissue of quotations from authorities and experts disagreeing with each other. Classic conflict journalism. And I still don't know whether I should boil the water or not. Apparently whether a threat to the general health does or does not exist is not important enough to verify for the readers.

All this is prelude to some thoughts about a large question just beginning to be debated nationally. Are our media outlets, and the journalists they employ, destroyers of community? They tend not to serve it well, as my anecdote implies. Nor, say the critics, do they do much to build it. And worse, say self-critics among them, they encourage a cynicism that causes people to withdraw from community.

The *Washington Post*'s omsbudsman lists the problems that motivate the leaders of a several-years-old movement called "civic journalism": "Newspapers concentrate too much on the negative. They are wedded to presenting each story as a conflict. Reporting has grown insiderish; the voices and concerns of the public are excluded. The effect of all this is corrosive, leaching from our society hope and the will to act."

To correct this, advocates of civic journalism say journalists should move beyond mere reporting to active concern about the community. Journalists used to be perceived as acting for the public. At some journalism schools, graduates subscribed to a creed that read, "I believe that the public journal is a public trust; that all connected with it are, to the full measure of their ability, trustees for the public; that acceptance of lesser service than public service is a betrayal of this trust." Author and magazine writer, James Fallows, whose book *Breaking the News* (Pantheon) is just out, believes they *have* betrayed that trust.

Citizens need information in order to cast their votes intelligently. They need it to be able to take part in the govern-

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ing of communities at all levels. They need information if they are to find common ground on complex issues. They have to depend on journalists for that information. Instead of presenting information the press concentrates on conflict. "By choosing to present public life as a contest among scheming political leaders," writes Fallows, "all of whom the public should view with suspicion, the press helps bring about that very result."

In an excerpt from his book ("Why Americans Hate the Media," *Atlantic Monthly*, February 1996), Fallows says that when ordinary citizens have a chance to pose questions, they rarely ask about the game of politics with which the media seem obsessed: Who's up, who's down? Will this law, issue, or stand help an office-holder or candidate or his or her opposition? Rather "they [the citizens] want to know how the reality of politics will affect them—through taxes, programs, scholarship funds, wars." He accuses the elite reporters of "limited" curiosity in the questions they ask and the stories they write. He documents the way in which their "analysis" of events, such as the State of the Union speech, is often diametrically opposite to the opinion of members of the public who heard or watched it: "The point is not that the pundits are necessarily wrong and the public necessarily right. The point is the gulf between the two groups' reactions."

Add to this the fear generated by the decline in circulation that has caused media outlets, especially newspapers, to cut back on news and concentrate on entertainment.

A corrective may lie in a study of a thriving section of the media world—the weekly newspapers of America, all 7,437 of them. In the past twenty-five years, according to an article in *Smithsonian*, their circulation has more than doubled, to 57 million nationwide. While the big dailies have cut back on gathering news, using only 8 or 9 percent of their revenues for it, the weeklies in general spend 15 percent—some of them as much as 25 percent.

The news in the recent issues in the weekly I read regularly (and which my family once owned), the *Wabasha Country Herald*, is of real and immediate interest to its readers. The stories included the solution of a murder unsolved for twenty years; the featuring of the community in a new movie; the prospect of the state's natural resource board buying up more private land in the county and its effect on tax rolls; the report of the actions of the county board; news of surrounding communities, obituaries, etc. All reports were factual, respectful of public officials, giving credit where credit was due and blame where necessary, and stressed the effect of the story on the community.

But, more important, the paper encourages and celebrates community at every turn. It hails the opening of new businesses and the successes of the town's children, in the military or chosen work place. It reports the school plays and concerts and all football, basketball, and hockey games, and urges attendance. Meetings of every organization, from veterans' groups to the Prairie River Homemakers, are important enough to rate reporting. Every donation to area services, activities, or charities merits a picture. Volunteers are noticed and praised. Festivals, town music events, and fairs are covered extensively. This is civic journalism and it works to help people come together on the grassroots level. Big media can find ways to do the same on the state and national levels. □

Robert Franklin

CONVERSATION IN BLACK & WHITE

Let's talk race

Because of increased racial tensions in the United States, last year President Bill Clinton called for a national dialogue to "cleanse our house of racism." But will simple dialogue between the races help? Are we so different, so antagonistic that we needn't even try?

From October 1993 through June 1994, I took part in such a dialogue. An art gallery just south of Houston's downtown had hung a group exhibition aimed at expressing racial experiences. Connected to the exhibit was a discussion titled "Blacks and Whites Together: A Conversation for Racial Harmony," soon simply shortened to "The Conversation." The dialogue was open to anyone. We met for about five hours one Saturday a month for nine months. There was no moderator, no structure. Anything that bore on race could be discussed. At first, about sixty people attended but the number dwindled to a steady ten or twelve at the end. We sat in a circle of folding chairs. The early meetings were stormy; some people simply blew off steam and disappeared, never to return. By the third Saturday, those who remained were committed to saying what none of us had ever said directly to the other race: What it is to be black, what it is to be white.

What did the conversation teach us? We heard stories of commonplace events of black life that utterly astonished the white members of the group. We learned that a black man is often suspected of being an armed robber when he enters a convenience store, that most of the black men in the group, before reaching the age of puberty, had been stopped and harassed by the police (and sometimes arrested), just for being black and on the street. We learned about a nationally famous black sculptor in Chicago who was denied entrance to a lavish party *in his honor* by a white policeman who couldn't believe he belonged on Lake Shore Drive. We heard about the bank loans denied, the cars that could not be bought, the snide comments about everything from African hair to whether blacks can understand high technology. Story after

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story illuminated what it means to be black in America, not a century ago, but now.

Each month, the blacks talked about the previous session as if it had been only the day before, about how hard they had thought about the things that had been said. By contrast, that previous meeting seemed remote to the whites, not something we'd thought much about in the meantime. Why the difference? Because for blacks, race is *the* issue. One black artist said race is like a gas in a room, permeating everything. I had never thought of it that way because for me it *isn't* that way. Race is something to think about or not as I please. For blacks there is not a choice. You deal with it well or ill, but you deal with it always. The black members seemed surprised to learn how peripheral the issue of race is to most whites. In that, we are two different societies.

The blacks in the group showed a definite sense of racial solidarity. They felt a certain personal stake in the successes and failures of other black people. This came as no surprise to me. I remembered some blacks had said that Anita Hill should not have accused Clarence Thomas, because to do so, particularly regarding sexual matters, was to tar the *race* with an old brush. But I also found that blacks in the group transferred their sense of racial unity onto white people. At the time I was shocked at their naiveté. Who could imagine whites claiming that Robert Bork's shortcomings should have been covered up *because he is white*? More recently though, the strong reaction by whites *as a race* to the verdict in the Simpson case suggests that it was I who was naive.

What we learned in the conversation would take a book to record, but what changes in attitudes, assumptions, responses did it produce? Hear the whites: "I'm freer to feel my true feelings toward blacks." "I don't have to pretend." "I can be critical of blacks now the same as I am of my white friends. I'm not constrained to be nice." "I'm not afraid of race. It's not a subject to avoid any more." "I don't put up with racism when I hear it. I'm more willing to speak out." Hear the blacks: "I can be more myself around white people." "I feel I can say things more honestly." "I feel more in control of situations with white people." "I could feel the empathy of whites, their openness. I talk more freely to white people now." Compare these words to those of Louis Farrakhan, to certain talk-show hosts, or to the tapes of Detective Mark Fuhrman.

How could nine Saturday afternoons make such changes in our perceptions? Because the Conversation was *about race*. I have reread some of the narratives of the fight against segregation during the fifties and sixties. They now seem hopelessly optimistic in their assumption that the mere association of the races in schools, restaurants, movie theaters, etc., was all that was required to purge our society of racism. The Conversation taught me that blacks and whites in America cannot know each other without knowing what part race plays in the life of the other. We cannot simply live and work together and never mention that I am white and you are black and what that means about our lives and how we see the world.

The Conversation was *personal*. We sat together, looked at each other, read each others' eyes, body language, tones of voice. The stories and feelings were our own. It was *voluntary*. No one made us do it: We were there because our hearts were there. The group controlled what the group did. We had no leader and no agenda. Those who came with an agenda were frustrated and soon left. In short, we were the conversation; our own true, common experiences of race created the often difficult and everlastingly valuable thing that was the conversation. And so, more than any book or history class, its lessons have stayed with me, because they are not lessons at all, but *people* who were seen, felt, known in explicitly racial ways. Once a person has done that, he or she has turned a corner and cannot turn back.

Racism requires ignorance of the other race. It assumes that we are insuperably different. The Conversation confronted that assumption. Of course, no one who took part in it fully understands the other race, nor can dialogue alone erase the gross inequalities between the races in employment, education, health, housing, etc. Those problems demand their own solutions. But a society whose races cannot talk to each other will never resolve the practical inequalities between them. If we remain ignorant of our common humanity, where will we find the desire to right the wrongs that plague us? To eradicate ignorance, frank talk and sympathetic listening are needed. Many people of both races want that, and the members of the Conversation wish to tell them it can work. □

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E.B. de Vito

Tints and Shadings

"With him," I overheard some one say,
"Everything is either black or white."

I thought of Van Gogh saying,
"Franz Hals has no less than
twenty-seven shades of black—"

and of the Eskimos,
said to have seventeen
shades of white.

For those who believe
everything is either black or white—

let them ask the artist:
always, it is the artist
who knows better.

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THE ERA OF 'BIG' GOVERNMENT

Why you'd miss it if it went

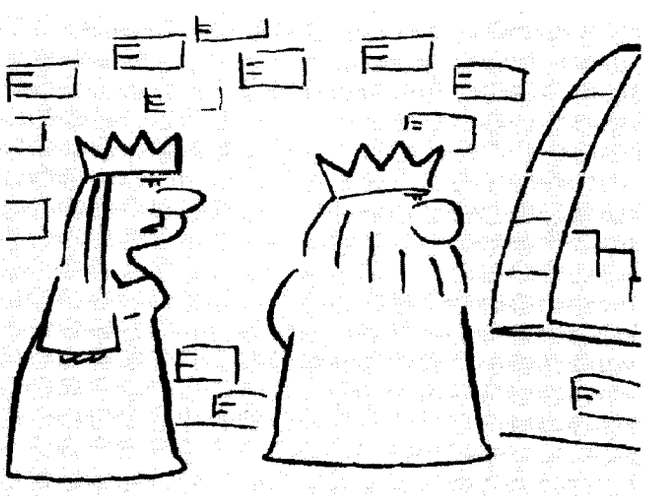
E. J. Dionne, Jr.

The new radicalism in American politics, exemplified by the Republican *Contract with America*, means that the debate in 1996 and beyond is not simply a contest between political parties. It's a confrontation between fundamentally different approaches to economic turbulence, moral uncertainty, and international disorder. American politics has been unsettled in recent years because most Americans sense that the country has not adapted well to these changes, and because they are ambivalent about them. They see enormous potential in technological change and the global economic revolution, but also know that both carry high costs, challenge old values, and threaten the living standards of many. Like most people facing comparable choices in other times, Americans would like to reap their gains from the new era and minimize the costs it will impose. The central political question is whether such a tradeoff can be managed, and how.

It is Newt Gingrich's genius to be the first major Republican politician to pose many of these questions explicitly. His strategy would make technological change itself the priority and push government aside. "We do have an economic game plan," said the House Republicans in their post-contract manifesto, *Restoring the Dream*, "and its central theme is to get bureaucratic government off of America's back and out of the way." What has been called Third Wave conservatism posits that virtually all the constructive changes in the next era will take place in the private marketplace.

This new conservatism harks back not to Ronald Reagan but to the Gilded Age of the 1890s. "Today," wrote Paul Starr in *The American Prospect*, "the forces of the nineteenth century are laying siege to the accomplishments of the twentieth century in the name of the twenty-first." The new conservatives would resolve the country's political crisis by shrinking government. They would resolve the economic crisis by accelerating the economic transition. Denying any link between economic developments and the country's moral state, they would leave the solution of the moral crisis to traditional institutions, limiting the government's charitable endeavors in the hope that this would revive religiously based programs for social and personal uplift. All this would resolve the international crisis by transforming the United States, in Newt Gingrich's memorable phrase, into "the decisive economic power on the planet, which is the most competitive nation, which is capable of leading the human race, and which has reestablished here at home a culture that works."

The new conservatism will fail not because it isn't bold—it is *very* bold to try to restore nineteenth-century doctrines—but because it seeks to define away almost all the problems that Americans want politicians to grapple with. The new conservatism is premised on the idea that there is no tradeoff in the new era, that if only economic change goes forward unfettered, everyone will be better off. But most Americans don't believe that. Nor do most Americans define the moral crisis simply in terms of the misbehavior of others and presume that more and better preaching will solve the problem. They experience the moral crisis in their own lives, in worries about whether their own work will be rewarded and how they will raise their children. There is overwhelming distrust of government, but this does not translate into the overweening confidence in the corporate sector that so characterizes the new conservatism. The popular anger at government reflects not simply an impatience with bureaucrats but also a disappointment at government's failure to help citizens who are working their way through a difficult economic period. Americans want some protection from *both* the government and the market to preserve space in which families, voluntary associations, churches, and the other institutions of civil society can thrive.



"Don't be ridiculous—you wouldn't last five minutes in the private sector."

E.J. Dionne, Jr., *is a columnist for the* Washington Post. *This essay is adapted from* They Only Look Dead, *published this month.* *© 1996 by E.J. Dionne, Jr. Reprinted by permission of Simon and Schuster.*

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If the old liberals seemed too eager to have the government usurp the authority of those institutions, the new conservatives appear blissfully unaware of how the economic marketplace can encroach on their prerogatives.

The central evasion in the program of the new conservatism is its effort to deny that even the most conservative government will constantly be making rules—through tax laws, regulations, or trade agreements—and that these rules have consequences. The new conservatism speaks the language of a joyful anarchism. In fact, it is like most conventional political movements, simply reshaping government to serve particular purposes and interests. If in the name of "deregulation" the government weakens environmental protections, the new rules it creates will powerfully affect how individuals and companies treat the environment. Repealing worker safety rules changes the incentives for employers who face enormous pressures from the marketplace to cut corners—even when they would prefer not to. If income from investments is treated more favorably for tax purposes than income from employment, the government is making a powerful statement about the relative importance of investment and labor. Trade agreements affect the lives and job prospects of millions. Even agreements promoting free trade are thousands of pages long, containing scores of new rules that reshape the economy.

The new laissez faire is simply Gilded Age conservatism dressed up in the finery of a high-tech age.

Thus the new conservatism's emphasis on a battle between "big government" and "small government" is a misleading and false choice because it disguises what is at state: not merely the size of government but the *direction* of government policy—the incentives government will be offering and the values that will dominate policy making. The central issue in American politics in 1996 and beyond is thus not *whether* new rules will be written but what those rules will be and the extent to which they will make it easier or harder for average Americans—and especially those in the Anxious Middle—to prosper in a new era.

There is a final difficulty with the new conservatism that goes largely undiscussed: Its program has been tried before and found wanting. That is the importance of realizing that the new *laissez faire* is simply Gilded Age conservatism dressed up in the finery of a high-tech age. Both doctrines cast all worker protections as "socialism" and any effort by government to write rational rules for a new style of competition as an attack on property rights.

Throughout this century American voters knew better. They understood that a free-market economy could not function properly in the absence of rules, workers' rights, government spending on public goods, and continuing public investments to enhance the skills and opportunities of the workforce. This understanding was not confined to liberals or Democrats. It was accepted also by most Republicans. It was Dwight Eisenhower, after all, who sponsored the Interstate Highway System, one of the great public works in American history, and sponsored the first student loan program to help poor and middle-class Americans go to college. Much of the American business community came to welcome government's role in preventing chaos in the marketplace and redressing social wrongs. This understanding of politics, drawn from America's Progressive tradition, defined the center of gravity in *both* parties.

The logic of the new high-technology era demands not the dismantling of this tradition that is now under way in Congress, but its revival and renewal. Not since the industrial transition at the turn of the century and the mass dislocation of the Great Depression have Americans felt a greater desire for creative approaches to governing.

Contemporary liberals have failed to meet this demand, and Americans have paid a high price for their loss of imagination. It is visible in the political fatalism of millions of working Americans who once looked to Washington in their efforts to achieve self-sufficiency. In casting ballots for Roosevelt and Truman, Kennedy and Johnson, these Americans sensed they were part of historic, and effective, political movement. Now, politics lies discredited and with it the hope that democratic government can respond effectively to change. The responsibility for this failure is widely shared. It encompasses "New Democrats" who said they would revitalize government, traditional liberals who claimed to speak for "average Americans," moderate Republicans who now face a choice of being isolated in their party or capitulating to its new disposition, and a Left that lost its way in the controversies surrounding multiculturalism and deconstruction and gave up on democratic politics.

But the game is not played out. Indeed, it is just beginning. The demand for a new Progressive departure will not go away, and all these groups have an opportunity to define the project.

By casting "government" and "the market" as the main mechanisms of social organization, the conventional political debate thus leaves out the most important institutions in people's lives—family, church, neighborhood, workplace organizations, and a variety of other voluntary institutions ranging from sports clubs and youth groups to privately organized child-care centers and the loose fellowships created at taverns like Cheers of television fame. All are places where, as the theme song of "Cheers" tells us, everybody knows your name. The great flaw in the binary choice between government and the market is described brilliantly by the sociologist Alan Wolfe in his book *Whose Keeper?*: "The opposition between individual freedom and state authority that guides so much of contemporary political theory...is a false opposition. [C]ivil society, not the individual, is the better alternative to government in modern society." Wolfe notes that

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while "believers in *laissez faire* complain that the state has grown at the expense of individuals, and advocates of a stronger state sometimes bemoan individualism, the truth is that the decline of obligations once associated with civil society strengthens both individualism and governmental authority."

Conservatives, both old and new, have done a good job of reminding us of the Progressives' sometimes excessive eagerness for replacing the mechanisms of private charity and communal responsibility—family, church, and mutual assistance societies—with the often clumsier mechanisms of government. What conservatives, especially the new conservatives, refuse to recognize is the extent to which these organizations are effective precisely because they do not operate according to the logic of free markets, but according to an older moral logic that predated capitalism. Following Wolfe, one can begin to see how the moral crisis Americans are experiencing grows not simply from the "countercultural" or "permissive" ideas that developed in the 1960s. Its roots lie deeper, in a society built on purely individualistic and market values that steadily cut away the bonds of solidarity, morality, and trust.

If profit is all that matters, filmmakers or music producers will not think twice about filling the marketplace with products that foster amoral or dysfunctional values among the young. If all personal ties between employer and employee are deemed to be "irrational" or "sentimental" when compared to the competitive needs of the marketplace, employers need not think at all about how work schedules might affect the ability of employees to rear their children or how cutbacks in medical coverage might affect their employees' lives. And if government gives no protection for those many employers who *do* care about such things, it risks forcing them out of business as they are undercut by competitors for whom cost and price are the only factors in business decisions. As David Broder has pointed out, one of the terrible ironies of the health-care battle is that the *minority* of employers who do not offer health insurance took control of the political debate from the vast *majority* of businesses that do. A debate that might have been over how business and individuals might fairly share the obligation of providing help for the sick became instead a fight over government "compulsion," as if government itself had created the need for health insurance.

The central irony of our time that so many of the new conservatives wish to avoid is this: *A capitalist society depends on noncapitalist values in order to hold together and prosper*. Adam Smith certainly recognized this. It is what Daniel Bell has referred to as "the cultural contradictions of capitalism." More recently, Francis Fukuyama has written of "the social virtues" behind "the creation of prosperity."

If the problem is cast this way, the purpose of Progressivism is not to use government to wreck the free market, but precisely the opposite: to create the social conditions in which the market can work well in its proper sphere. The Progressives' goal is not to strengthen government for government's sake, but to use government where possible to strengthen the institutions of civil society.

Progressives—liberals—thus need to embrace a politics of liberty and community. They cannot leave the definition of liberty to their conservative adversaries. They need to contest the negative definition of liberty as incomplete. Yes, individuals need to be protected against omnipotent, abusive government. But they also have a right to look to government to help in defending their autonomy and expanding the possibilities of self-reliance. Government should not weaken the bonds of civil society. But government can step in to strengthen civil society and protect it against the disruptions created by the normal workings of the economic market. Surely anyone who claims to believe in "family values" should want to relieve families of some of the pressures placed upon them by work and economic distress.

A New Progressivism that would operate in accord with these principles would take seriously Republican strategist Bill Kristol's talk about "the politics of liberty and the sociology of virtue." But it would contest the effectiveness of the new conservative program supported by Kristol and his allies, arguing that liberty and virtue require not only freedom from government coercion, but also the active support of a government that understands both its obligations and its limits. It is not enough to preach virtue to a family that finds its living standard falling despite its own best efforts to work, save, invest, and care for its children. Such a family surely deserves some support for its own efforts to expand its opportunities—and, at the least, some insurance against the worst economic catastrophes that might befall it.

Alternatives to the new conservatism will thus arise simply because the voters will demand them. One can see in the responses to Pat Buchanan's nationalism and to Ross Perot's anti-Washington pronouncements the rumblings of an Anxious Middle prepared to be radicalized by economic frustrations, moral unease, and impatience with government's failures. Thus the basic inspiration behind the broad Progressive project remains relevant—a belief in the use of government to expand individual choice and protect communities, an effort to improve living standards across the society, and an understanding that a democratic society works best with a broad and thriving middle class. Progressives do not seek absolute equality or anything like it; but they also know that rising inequality can be dangerous for democracy.

The tragedy of President Bill Clinton's term, especially his first two years, is that he raised many of the right issues without producing either the results he promised or a set of political alliances that could carry on a long-term project of social reconstruction. He did not encourage New and Old Democrats to work together; if anything, rifts in his party seemed to widen. He did not draw in moderate Republicans, many of whom still have impulses shaped by their party's progressive tradition. He did not convince the Left that he shared its goals of social justice and social equality. And he did not

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succeed in nurturing a progressive wing within the business community that accepted the need for government action to solve problems that the free market neither would nor could solve on its own. Clinton's most obvious failure was personal; that none of the wings of the potential Progressive alliance fully trusted him. It was a personal failure that had repercussions across almost every area of policy.

Yet precisely because Clinton was on the right track in the questions he asked and in some of the solutions he offered, many of the issues of the Clinton term will need revisiting—perhaps even by Clinton himself.

In an otherwise brilliant dissection of the great economic and political transformations of our era, ("The Age of Social Transformation," *Atlantic*, November 1994) the social thinker Peter Drucker asserts flatly that "if this century proves one thing, it is the futility of politics." He argues that the large changes of the twentieth century had nothing to do with the "headline-making political events" and everything to do with social and economic changes that operated "like ocean currents deep below the hurricane-tormented surface of the sea." These, he says, have had "the lasting, indeed the permanent, effect."

Drucker goes on to describe with great clarity the agricultural revolution, the declining role of agricultural employment, the rise of industrialism, and the emergence of the blue-collar worker, "the first lower class in history that could be organized and could stay organized." He speaks of urbanization and the fact that cities in this age, unlike cities in earlier ages, actually *improve* public health. This was, he writes, primarily because the factory produced higher living standards, but also because of "new public health measures: purification of water, collection and treatment of wastes, quarantine against epidemics, inoculation against disease." The new era, with the rise of the "knowledge worker," Drucker concludes, will demand "social and political innovations"—particularly in education, because the new period will put a premium on "the quality of knowledge and the productivity of knowledge."

What is so striking about Drucker's view is that his detailed and insightful analysis of developments in commerce, science, and society flies in the face of his insistence on "the futility of politics." *That is because he takes democratic politics for granted.* The truth is that almost none of the advances Drucker describes could have happened absent the victories of democracy and free government. The freedom accorded by democracy allowed the innovators to experiment, the scientists to discover, societies to create forms of organization appropriate to their needs. Social protections, through government and private organizations, allowed prosperity to be shared under conditions of social peace. Industrialization did not have that same bracing effect in other places where it went forward rapidly, notably the Soviet Union, largely because the political conditions were different.

Politics and government cannot raise children, write love songs... or discover a cure for cancer. But politics and government do shape the conditions under which such acts of creativity are made easier or harder, more likely or less likely. Politics has everything to do with building a more just, more civil, more open society.

Moreover, Drucker's entirely accurate assertion about the effective organization of blue-collar workers is a statement about politics itself. The twentieth century turned out for the better in significant part because ordinary people were able to use politics in free societies to do extraordinary things—first to organize themselves and then to demand and win improvements in their living standards, create opportunities for their children, and insist on a basic social equality that is the essence of democracy as a way of life. This century, far from proving the futility of politics, is a history of the triumph of *democratic politics*. At the end of the century, the central problem confronting the democracies is not excessive government or a lack of economic and technical inventiveness, but a decay in the sort of social and political inventiveness and organization that gave power to ordinary citizens, shaped the economy into an engine of mass prosperity, and strengthened democracy.

The overriding need in the United States and throughout the democratic world is for a new engagement with democratic reform, the political engine that made the industrial era as successful as it was. The technologies of the information age will not on their own construct a successful society, any more than industrialism left to itself would have made the world better. The industrial age needed to be rescued from those who thought that technology on its own could save the human race. Now the information age must also be saved from the cyberutopians. Even the most extraordinary breakthroughs in technology and the most ingenious applications of the Internet will not save us from social breakdown, crime, or injustice. Only politics, which is the art of how we organize ourselves, can even begin to take on such tasks.

Politics and government cannot raise children, write love songs, create computer languages, invent the technology after the microchip, or discover a cure for cancer. But politics and government do shape the conditions under which such acts of creativity are made easier or harder, more likely or less likely. Politics has everything to do with building a more just, more civil, more open society. Those who rallied to Progressivism, the cause of those who believe that democratic government has the capacity to improve society, always understood this. Their time has come again. □

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IN PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Sources of American discontent

T. R. Martin

With few exceptions, human beings want to improve their material welfare; to own more goods, live in more comfortable housing, eat well, work less laboriously, have good medical care, feel secure. Wanting a better life is a natural goal of our striving and, within limits, a legitimate one. On this score, how well is the United States doing? And how do Americans feel about it?

Though welfare economists use a number of *indicia* to measure material well-being, the single most important measure, as it subsumes so many others, is income. But, apart from the huge task of gathering reliable data, deriving meaningful real-income comparisons poses vexing questions. How, for example, does one compare the United States and Mozambique, with its reported annual per capita income of about $80? Beyond indicating that the gap is wide indeed, comparing the numbers at the extremes is not very useful.

Another difficulty is the absence of a common standard of measurement. The starting point is the U.S. dollar; but other nations have their own currencies. Comparing gross national products by using dollar equivalents based on international exchange rates gives one set of answers. On this basis, the United States comes in about tenth in the world.

So we're not the richest? Ah, but what is more important is the purchasing power of each nation's monetary unit. So the experts convert the numbers to "purchasing power parity." After this adjustment, the World Bank reports that tiny Luxembourg is in first place ($29,510 per capita, 1993), the United States second ($24,750), Japan seventh ($21,090), and Germany eighth ($20,980).

Luxembourg aside, then, we are the richest people on earth, surely an enviable position. Are we also the happiest? Or, if not content, at least rather well satisfied? Without attempting statistical comparisons, it seems open to doubt. In a *Time*/CNN poll conducted in January of last year, 53 percent of respondents agreed that this country is in "deep and serious trouble." (Ten years ago, the figure was 40 percent.) Social observers—and not only Jimmy Carter—frequently use the word "malaise" to describe our collective state of mind.

How explain this seeming anomaly? Objectively, there are many contributing factors; subjectively, differing explanations reflect conflicting interests, ideologies, and values (the latter, as will be seen, a much-neglected element). But part of the answer no doubt lies in the figures.

Disposable personal income per capita (in constant dollars) increased 21.5 percent from 1970 to 1980, but only 11.7 percent between 1980 and 1990, and, despite the overall growth, real median income per household grew only 1.7 percent between 1984 and 1992. The next two years showed some improvement, but over the past decade growth has been anemic, and this in an era of rising expectations.

Moreover, using per capita income as an indicator of citizen satisfaction is like aiming a blunderbuss at a bullseye. If we are the wealthiest of the major nations, we also have the most unequal distribution of income and wealth. A Twentieth Century Fund study estimates that the top 1 percent of families owns about 40 percent of U.S. wealth. According to New York University economist Edward Wolff (cited by Robert Kuttner in the *Washington Post*), that same 1 percent, with average wealth of $2.35 million each, holds 46.2 percent of all stocks and 54.2 percent of all bonds. And the next 9 percent own most of the rest; the bottom 90 percent hold just 10 percent of all this wealth. Since 1982, Kuttner writes, the aggregate value of the New York Stock Exchange has risen more than 400 percent, while the average worker's real wage has declined about 15 percent. The maldistribution of income would be even worse were it not for transfer payments such as government pensions, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, and other public assistance programs.

Statistics tend to make the eyes glaze over. But a seriously skewed distribution of income and wealth should not be discounted as a source of discontent. Americans are amply informed about (and fascinated by) the enormous incomes

"We overshopped, and now, by golly, we're going to overeat."

T. R. Martin *is dean emeritus of the school of business administration, Marquette University.*

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and profligate spending habits of top business executives, professional athletes, star entertainers, and others at the apex of the economic pyramid—a phenomenon often characterized as "obscene." Seeing (especially on TV) how the rich live, in fiction and in fact, hardly makes Mr. and Mrs. American ecstatic about their own situation, expecially when they fear unemployment and/or loss of medical insurance, worry about paying college costs for their children, fret about retirement income, etc. Many couples feel locked into the two-income pattern to maintain a standard of living deemed essential. Among other things, according to health experts, many are chronically sleep-deprived.

Economic fears, envy, and insecurity are not the only sources of the malaise reflected in polls. Many are persuaded that something in our society is badly amiss. Again, there are figures to support that view . William J. Bennett's *Index of Leading Cultural Indicators* (1993) charts increases in negative social phenomena over a just-elapsed two-decade period. In 1970, for example, the juvenile violent crime arrest rate per 100,000 was 215.9; in 1991, 430.6. The percentage of children living in poverty in 1970 was 15.1; in 1990, 21.8. Some 669,000 cases of child abuse were reported in 1976; the estimated figure for 1991 was 2,694,000. There were 19.9 abortions for every 1,000 teen-age girls in 1970; an estimated 43.8 in 1990. The teen suicide rate per 100,000 went from 5.9 in 1970 to 11.3 in 1990. The percentage of children living only with their mothers doubled from 11 in 1970 to 22 in 1990. The number of violent crimes reported in 1960 was 288,460; in 1970, 738,820; in 1991, 1,911,770.

These and other data suggest very strongly that American society is in disarray, and, it surely seems, in decline. A great many Americans sense this; they are fairly familiar with the kind of information Bennett has gathered, from firsthand experience and from the media. But they find themselves mystified about the underlying causes. Hypotheses abound; clear answers are elusive. Without questioning any of the factors already listed, I want to offer an analogy that will suggest the relevance of another and, I think, significant component of our malaise.

Moviegoers will recall a riveting scene near the end of *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. The British officer, Colonel Nicholson (Alec Guinness) has retained authority over his men through long imprisonment by the Japanese in Burma. He is driven by the goal of building a fine bridge over the river, and under his command the prisoners succeed magnificently. Nicholson's motive is puzzling. The bridge would serve the enemy very well indeed as a strategic link in the transportation system connecting Bangkok and Rangoon. Why would the colonel cooperate? Pierre Boule, author of the book on which the movie was based, explains it in terms of the "military mind"—"a sense of duty, observance of ritual, obsession with discipline, and love of the job well done."

In the unforgettable denouement, when three British commandos undertake to infiltrate the site and destroy the completed bridge, Nicholson discovers the scheme and tries to thwart it. A young commando leaps out of the bushes and plunges a knife into the back of the Japanese camp commander, standing right next to Nicholson. The Japanese soldiers lining the bridge, now alerted, bring down rifle fire on Nicholson and two commandos. In a moment of enlightenment, right after seeing the two commandos die almost in his arms, Nicholson's folly dawns on him. "What have I done?" he cries. Then, hit by mortar fire (ironically from the remaining commando's weapon), he lurches toward the plunger that will detonate the explosive charges on the bridge, falls on it as he loses consciousness—and destroys the bridge!

"What have I done?" What are we doing?

Too many of us, the evidence suggests, are chasing money with the same blind obsessiveness that held Colonel Nicholson captive and unaware. We pursue it either for its own sake or for what it will buy: a newer car, a second car (or a third), a bigger house, this gadget or that one, a more prestigious college for the children...whatever.

Too few recognize or question the compulsive character of this drive for more. It threatens the integrity of the professions, especially law and medicine. It serves as all-sufficient rationale for corporate policies (downsizing, union-busting, pension-raiding, the endless global search for cheaper labor) that destroy jobs and communities. It distorts our politics and suborns our politicians. Something is wrong when the world's richest nation is the least generous among developed countries in granting aid to poor lands and peoples, when wealthy individuals, communities, corporations resist all and any measures to equalize educational opportunities, access to medical care, and decent housing. It does not seem a far stretch to postulate a linkage between this all but universally accepted goal of living, on the one hand, and the social pathologies documented by William Bennett: violent crime, sex without commitment, abused and abandoned children, rising divorce rates. The ruling value is the same: Me first.

We began by saying that wanting to improve our lot is natural to us, and legitimate. But, as someone has said, if you love money you will never have enough of it. (Not money, but "the love of money is the root of all evil," Saint Paul wrote.) For whatever reasons—historians, sociologists, pundits will wrangle over the question—this society is suffused, to the point of sickness, with the desire for more, and then more.

This is a disease of the spirit, not readily addressed by government. Social policies such as realistically generous foreign aid, enlightened welfare programs, a genuinely progressive tax system will more likely follow upon rather than create a change of spirit. Will we, like Colonel Nicholson, experience a moment of enlightenment? Not likely. But let us pray that over time we can come to recognize the wisdom of Pope John Paul II in *Evangelium vitae*: "In a word, we can say that the cultural change which we are calling for demands from everyone the courage to adopt a new *life-style*, consisting in making practical choices—at the personal, family, social, and international level—on the basis of a correct scale of values: *the primacy of being over having, of the person over things.*" □

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Richard Alleva

DEATH TRIPS

'Leaving Las Vegas' & 'Dead Man Walking'

In *Leaving Las Vegas*, Nicholas Cage plays Ben, a Hollywood scriptwriter who, upon being discharged for drunkenness, uses his severance pay to drink himself to death in the city of neon and quickie marriages. Another L.A. refugee, the prostitute Sera (Elisabeth Shue), gladly agrees to keep him company, free of charge, during his last days. Lots of incidents occur but nothing even slightly deflects the trajectory of the liquid suicide. At the end, Sera sums up their relationship: "I accepted him for what he was, and I didn't expect him to change."

The audience better not expect him to change, either. Nor should it expect any explanation or suggestion of what drives Ben to self-destruction. (The job loss was just a symptom, not a cause, and the same goes for the hero's shattered marriage.) In this film, process is all. We fall to death with the hero, and if you don't like the sensation of descent, stay away.

Mike Figgis, the writer-director, has always been good at evoking dreamy and/or doomful states of mind (*Internal Affairs*, *Stormy Monday*), so he's in his element here. But I don't think it is the visual in self-destruction or even the fine acting of Cage and Shue that won the allegiance of the critics. (It made nearly a clean sweep of the New York Film Critics Circle and National Society of Film Critics awards.)

Film critics are romantics. They have to be, for only romantics can stand looking at so much dreck in search of the rare gem. Romantics are always at least a little bit in love with death, and many great romantic works of art (Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*) are infused with the attraction to death. *Leaving Las Vegas* gives you a death trip for the price of your ticket and then returns you to your own life where you can shake your head in admiration at "bold, more adventurous people, those hooked on liberty and doing their own destruction" (critic David Thomson).

But is this movie a great romantic work of art? The good, clean prostitute-with-a-heart-of-gold Sera cossets our hero through his descent, but she's got lots of help from director Figgis. Way too much help. The lush, warm photography that captures the pink evening skies over Nevada; the equally soothing shadows of the motel rooms where Ben and Sera cuddle, guzzle, and mutter pseudo-profundities; the dreamy, lounge-lizard songs on the soundtrack crooned by Sting; the slow-motion lyricism of much of the staging, including an underwater shot of Cage in a swimming pool where he belts down a bottle of scotch while floating in aqua blue—all these devices soothe the hero's passing as much as Elisabeth Shue's big milkmaid's body does. And they pamper our own sensibilities as well. We may be with Ben on a death trip, but it is a cosy, bumpless ride. It is Death Lite.

I didn't mind the lack of clearly specified motivation for the suicide; after all, maybe such plunges into the abyss are, finally, beyond rational explanations. But what alienated and eventually bored me was that there was no trace of that part of Ben that wasn't an alcoholic, no indication of that part of him that had nothing to do with booze. This character exists on screen only to drink and die. Far from being "hooked on liberty," he seemed programmed. Contrast Ben with the Consul in Malcolm Lowry's novel, *Under the Volcano*. In the latter we see not only the drunken mess but what is buried under the mess; acute wit, a capacity for love and compassion, an artist's sensibility. Within the quotidian man who degrades himself with rum and tequila is an alternative consul who might have returned his wife's love and won the respect of his half-brother; and it is this consul that Lowry never loses sight of. There was once a sane road not taken, and we can dimly discern the happy land where it might have led.

Too much to ask of a movie? Not of a truly good movie. But *Leaving Las Vegas* is just kitsch for romantic intellectuals.

The alternative life, the goodness that might have been, is harrowingly on view in the final moments of the remarkable Tim Robbins film, *Dead Man Walking*. When the rapist-murderer, Mathew Poncelet, goes to the execution chamber and faces the parents of the young couple he helped slaughter, he feels, possibly for the first time in his life, the weight of his own humanity and its connection with all humanity. Just be-

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fore receiving the lethal injection, this racist, skinny brute, sporting a Wayne Newton pompadour and a Mephisto goatee, becomes a soul narrowly wrenched out of hell.

Poncelet is a composite of two murderers described in the account by Sister Helen Prejean of her spiritual advisory of prisoners on Louisiana's death row. As presented on screen (I haven't read the book), Prejean's Christianity is both radical and traditional, radical in so far as it is traditional. Believing that every person is a soul enveloped by flesh, she regards capital punishment as a usurpation of God's prerogative. However, also believing that a murderer is damned unless he repents, Sister Helen must get Mathew to face, acknowledge, repent his evil, and that's even more difficult than staying the hand of the state.

So the heart of this movie resides in the joshing, badgering, prevaricating, and pleading confrontations between nun and murderer. As written, these scenes are so good that I wish they were better. The dialogue is flavorsome, often acute, yet Poncelet's character isn't truly sounded. Though the character of Sister Helen is better limned, some flashbacks to her childhood contribute only psychological fuzz.

But, as acted, the characterizations couldn't be better. Susan Sarandon's art has become Tolstoyan in its directness and clarity, its absolute freedom from technical fuss. Sean Penn's performance as Poncelet is like an insidious tune you find yourself humming in unguarded moments. The camera is always on the right face at any given moment.

The meaning of the Poncelet-Prejean encounters—the need to cut through self-deceit and corroding hate to win salvation—is extended by the scenes in which Sister Helen visits the parents of the victims. She's not only trying to comfort them and educate herself by being the sounding board for their grief. But Poncelet's evil has redefined their spiritual geography. Now they live in the Country of the Wronged and Prejean must be regarded as an enemy because she continues to be Poncelet's spiritual adviser. This movie could have portrayed the parents as hate-twisted bigots, but no, their grief is given its due, and the moviemakers avoid the smugness that so many anti-capital-punishment campaigners exude. Robbins and his colleagues refuse to dwell in the Country of the Righteous.

They'll be accused of it anyway, sooner or later, and the climactic sequence—Poncelet's execution—may become the crux of the accusations. Up to this point, Robbins has given us glimpses of the rape-murder, confusedly envisioned by Sister Helen as she tries to reconcile Mathew's version of what happened (in which he is innocent) with what the law says he did. Now, just as he's executed, we see what really happened and it's horrible. Just as we're about to get misty-eyed over the convict's fate, Tim Robbins dries our eyes. This took moral and aesthetic guts. Some will say that by cutting back and forth between murders and execution, Robbins is equating the two and accusing the state of being a murderer. Others will ask why the director reveals the horror of the crime just when such horror is beside the point if we are truly opposed to capital punishment. Why is Robbins giving ammunition to the enemy?

But here is how I read the scene. Robbins is certainly showing both murder and execution as parts of a chain of violent acts. But to see two acts as part of a chain is not necessarily to equate them. In war, the killing of soldiers by soldiers in the heat of combat is obviously not the same thing as the execution of helpless prisoners, but both are part of the hellishness of war. By murdering his victims, Poncelet has acted with a monstrousness that the state will never visit on him, for it is his atrocity that aggressively inaugurates the sequence of force. The execution completes the sequence, but, watching it, a yearning wells up in the viewer's breast. Can't the sequence end differently? In ongoing punishment and ongoing redemption rather than poison coursing through the veins and the light dimming in the eyes? This movie is an outcry against a deep-seated human urge to enforce closure with death.

Kitsch reassures. Art disturbs. And here is a disturbing thought this movie gave me. Would Mathew Poncelet have confronted his own evil absent the imminence of his own demise? Would Sister Helen's probings and promptings have succeeded if the murderer's sentence had been commuted? On the basis of what the movie shows me, I don't think so. Then, did capital punishment, as well as Sister Helen, save Poncelet's soul? This idea needn't detain Helen Prejean. She works against capital punishment because she believes this is the right thing to do. She also tries to get murderers to confront their own evil because that is another right thing to do. More power to her on both counts. But, to some of us watching this movie, the implications of Mathew Poncelet's spiritual fate vis-à-vis his physical fate are quite disturbing. Can the killing contraptions of the state be, in some cases, the gateways to salvation? □

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Let us now praise America's malls

City Life
Urban Expectations in a New World
Witold Rybczynski
Scribner, $23, 256 pp.

Paul Elie

Although his books are shelved in the architecture section, Witold Rybczynski is really an uncommonly curious and nimble cultural critic. His latest book, as one might expect from its title, is first of all a book about cities. In it he proposes that from the first colonial settlements to the port cities of the Federal period, from frontier towns to today's vast metropolitan areas and malls, Americans' expectations for the places where they live have always been urban, and that this trait has helped to distinguish American cities from European ones. Such an argument requires a broad definition of "urban," one that includes New York, Toronto, the upstate New York town of Plattsburgh, and places far smaller. But Rybczynski isn't making an argument so much as making an excursion—or creating a kind of setting for an excursion. It becomes clear that *City Life* is really a book about how we live, how we choose how we live, and how we might make those choices more wisely.

Like many of the best cultural critics, Rybczynski doesn't state his case so much as give form to the virtues he espouses. Thus his book has the qualities that he most admires in urban life. It is orderly but not too planned—he is free to roam for his own pleasure and the reader's. Past and present are always jostling against each other; with Tocqueville up the street a ways from Andy Warhol. Rybczynski's personality is informed by the places he writes about as ours are informed by the places where we live, which, he observes, are always "facilitating and shaping our wanderings."

Rybczynski begins by telling about a friend who, upon returning from Paris, asked him why North American cities aren't like those in Europe. "Where were the elegant avenues, the great civic spaces, and the impressive public monuments?" While *City Life* answers her question, it is structured as a chronological account of the development of American cities against the background of Europe—the native land of the men who founded the first American cities, the training ground of the great planners and architects of a century ago, and a constant touchstone for the civic aspirations of Americans, who have transformed European urban themes even as we have emulated them.

After a taxonomic survey of different types of city plans (the cosmic, the practical, the organic) and different kinds of towns (open, closed, subjugated), Rybczynski discusses the plans of early American cities, whose defining traits were set in place when they were planned, not when they were founded. As often as not, of course, these cities didn't develop the way the planners expected. William Penn planned Philadelphia as a rectangular grid of large plots, only for them to be subdivided by thrifty Quakers. Williamsburg was planned exquisitely but was hindered by its lack of a port. Washington was planned as a port, but Thomas Jefferson didn't anticipate the buildup of silt in the Potomac, so Baltimore emerged as the mid-Atlantic port city.

Here, as throughout the book, Rybczynski aims to surprise the reader with facts that run counter to expectations. We learn that Renaissance Venice had a population the size of Little Rock's, that

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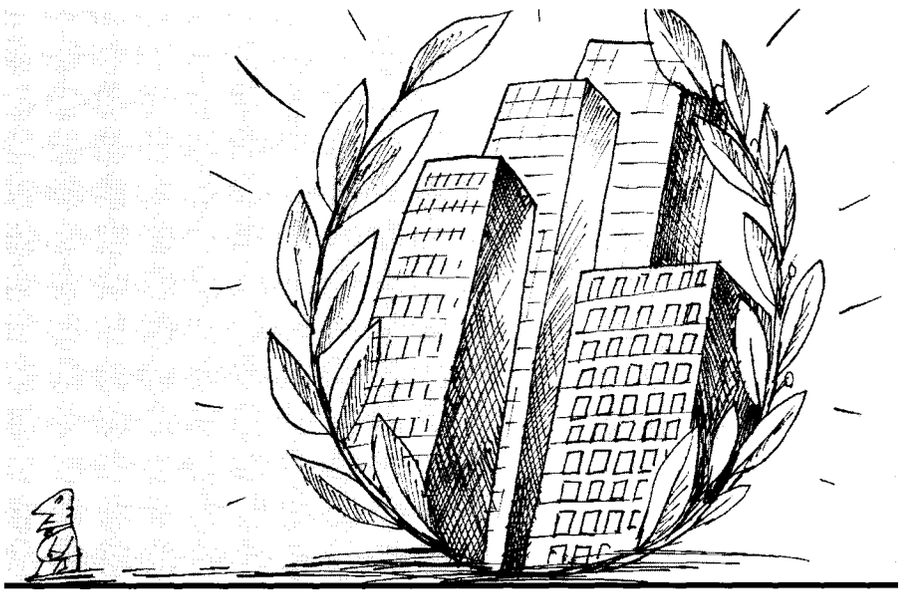
San Jose is now larger than San Francisco and Zurich smaller than Buffalo, that the architecture of New Orleans's French Quarter emulates Spanish and not French models. "Seventeenth-century grid planning," he informs us, "did incorporate a new type of urban space for which there was no contemporary European precedent: the broad, tree-lined residential street. This emphasis on trees was distinctive, and was epitomized by the characteristic American habit (popularized, if not invented, by William Penn) of naming streets after trees."

The tone of that passage is characteristic: learned, lightly inflected, quicker to describe than to judge, shining bright with Rybczynski's curiosity about cities and their histories. When he does strike an evaluative note, he is a gentle contrarian, as when he suggests that the grid pattern of American cities, often associated with dull regularity, "was initially adopted for easy and rapid real estate development, but it also turned out to be an ideal accommodating device for a more tolerant society."

As Rybczynski's narrative draws near the twentieth century, the prescriptive note in his prose grows more pronounced. After an inevitable chapter about Tocqueville's thoughts on American cities (he couldn't get used to numbered streets, another American invention), Rybczynski turns to Chicago, and to the planners who are the heroes of the book: Frederick Law Olmsted, Charles McKim, and Daniel Burnham and his sons. The Great Fire that destroyed much of Chicago in 1871 gave a generation of planners the opportunity to refashion the city in accord with its growth in population and civic ambitions, and the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 allowed Olmsted, McKim, and Burnham to build, at public expense, a "White City" (most of the buildings were fashioned from unusually brilliant white stone, as though to banish the soot and ash left by the Great Fire) that borrowed from Europe yet was American in character. Stating his own ideal, Rybczynski writes: "Chicago's Columbian Exposition provided a real and well-publicized demonstration of how the unruly American downtown could be tamed through a partnership of classical architecture, urban landscaping, and heroic public art."

It is a long way from the White City to present-day Chicago, and in Rybczynski's view American cities would do well to make the pilgrimage back, somehow. He is an admirer of the skyscraper, but he is dismayed by the way the skyscraper, whose heights greatly increased the value of downtown real estate, put an end in many downtowns to the mixed-use approach, in which residential, commercial, and civic structures nestle cheek by jowl. More pointedly, he laments the way the cult of the skyscraper diverted the attention of modernist architects toward the great symbolic statement and away from domestic architecture and the design of the neighborhood as a whole.



Indeed, in Rybczynski's account American modernism is the story of how architects lost sight of the way people actually live. In the cities, the disciples of Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier (whom he sees as a Warhol-like artist of the public gesture) tried to adapt the models of the skyscraper and the luxury apartment tower for low-income housing, with notoriously bad results, as seen in Chicago's Cabrini-Green project: "The well-off have doormen, janitors, repairmen, baby sitters, and gardeners; the poor have no hired help. Without restricted access, the lobbies and elevators are vandalized; without proper maintenance, broken elevators do not get fixed, staircases become garbage dumps, and broken windows remain unreplaced; without baby sitters, single mothers are stranded in their apartments, and adolescents roam, unsupervised, sixteen floors below...."

In the suburbs, meanwhile, town planners ignored the precedents of such planned communities as Riverside, Illinois, and Garden City, on Long Island, and developers built sprawling "developments"—there is really no other word for them—of undifferentiated single-family units in order to meet the huge demand for home ownership among returning soldiers after World War II. As a result—or a related development—the shopping mall became the de facto civic center of most suburbs, causing the cities and towns they had been built around to decay.

Surprisingly, Rybczynski likes malls, and finds in them the "urban" qualities that have characterized American town life down the years: walking, face-to-face encounters with neighbors and strangers, a blend of small stores and large ones, retail and restaurants, purposeful shopping and creative loafing. In fact, he sees malls fulfilling the civic expectations that cities themselves have given up on. "I think that what attracts people to malls is that they are perceived as public spaces where rules of personal conduct are enforced. In other words, they are more like public streets

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used to be before police indifference and overzealous protectors of individual rights effectively ensured that *any* behavior, no matter how antisocial, is tolerated."

I suspect that there are many reasons for Rybczynski's temperate advocacy of malls beyond his natural affection for them, which he discovered when he and his wife found themselves driving from their home in rural Quebec to a mall outside Plattsburgh "just to stroll." His position is derived from his broad definition of "urban" virtues, and from his fondness for surprising his readers: he is determined, I think, to champion the virtues of the urban past without becoming a throwback or a curmudgeon. And I think this may be due to his sense that open-mindedness and tolerance for the mall-going ways of others are characteristically urban virtues, which he tries to practice in his work as he does on the streets of Philadelphia, where he now lives. He is keen-eyed, commonsensical, able to reason and to judge, but his manner is that of a person who is (this is the title of one of his previous books) just "looking around."

Unfortunately, in making his gently contrarian argument in favor of malls Rybczynski seems not to see the crucial way they stand outside of the mixed-use approach he favors. No matter how many stores they have, most malls have a few offices at most, and no government buildings. And, of course, no one lives there. Malls will never be urban as long as everybody must drive home.

In a similar way, Rybczynski's genial and upbeat approach to cultural criticism leaves his generally expert, original, and delicious book lacking one other virtue that can be called urban: that of genuine conflict or reckoning with the arguments of others. For all his advocacy of the city as a place of heterogeneity and face-to-face encounters, he seems to be all by himself in the urbane project of his book. This is due partly to rhetorical selection on his part: he generalizes about overly theoretical architects and takes a swipe or two at the safely dead high modernists, but never fully engages the arguments of current urban thinkers whose views might differ from his.

This lack of argument can also be traced to the nature of Rybczynski's topic, the physical city. While he knows the writings of the great architects and planners, his main exhibits are the structures themselves, which are silent. It is enough to make the writer who is drawn to other subjects—politics, say, or religion—finish this book at once faintly disappointed with Rybczynski and in envy of him, the master of a subject whose protagonists are richly expressive but cannot talk back. □

Paul Elie, *a frequent* Commonweal *contributor, is the editor of* A Tremor of Bliss: Contemporary Writers on the Saints *(Riverhead).*

CUOMO ON THE CONTRACT

Reason to Believe
Mario Cuomo
Simon & Schuster, $21, 191 pp.

James Duffy

New York Democrats, when they have put pen to paper, have often enhanced our understanding of government. Consider, for example, Al Smith's *The Citizen and His Government* (1935), George Washington Plunkitt's scoundrelly reminiscences of life before civil service, FDR's lucid, explanatory speeches, even Ed Koch's *Mayor* (1984). New York politicians must confront nearly all the American social and economic problems that Mario Cuomo describes as "big, awkward, expensive, and even repugnant." Experience in this ethnic and economic melting pot just may give its public officials a more complex sense of what government service is about than, say, the congressman from the Sixth District of Georgia.

This company of writing politicos was joined long ago by Cuomo, three times governor before being "capsized by the Republican tide of 1994." His *Diaries* (1984), detailing his first campaign for governor in 1982, are as good a personal record of running for office as we are likely to get. Now, in *Reason to Believe*, he serves up a brisk critique of the current Republican "revolution."

Nonrightist commentators and officeholders alike today seem awestruck by the *Contract with America* and determined to flagellate any observer who has anything good to say about the progressive legacy that began with the New Deal. Compromise and weak-kneed tinkering with the clauses of the contract are the fashion. And liberals, no matter how incisive their suggestions for true reform, as opposed to slash-and-burn destruction, are treated with condescension, if not outright derision.

Cuomo has certainly not escaped criticism. As governor he was often characterized as being a better talker than a doer, and his failure to run for president or accept nomination to the Supreme Court turned off many would-be admirers. Despite the carping and the reservations, however, his undoubted

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intelligence and experience give him the credentials to criticize the contract which, when all the leaves of the artichoke are peeled away, exposes us to a heart reeking of social indifference and an almost anarchic contempt for government.

Cuomo unabashedly labels the contract "the New Harshness," and he has the gumption to say straight out that "in large part it was designed by distilling the bitterest juices from the people's anger, bottling them as legislation, and then offering it all back as a magic elixir." It is "composed of simplistics, emotionalism, shibboleths, and empty slogans that appeal to the worst that is in us."

The former governor is especially telling on the "devolution" of programs and responsibilities from the federal government to the states. Noting that he is "a great fan of states and what they can do," he nonetheless views devolution, as preached by the Republicans, as a regression going clear back to the failed Articles of Confederation; it is "foolish" to think that the "notion that handing over a problem to the states...leads magically to solving it." Taking welfare as an example, he foresees that without nationally imposed standards a "welfare-cutting contest" will pit one state against another, with "the poor taking all the punishment."

He is scathing about the inadequacy and hypocrisy of the Republican welfare proposals, which evidence an effort to "transform the issue, with all its moral and practical complexity, into a blunt political wedge to divide the middle class against the poor," the middle class being interestingly defined as those "not rich enough to be worry-free but not poor enough to be on welfare." Slashing the rolls "might make welfare itself go away, but it won't make the problem go anywhere, because the real problem is poverty and the real solution is producing jobs and opportunity." True reform would not be money-saving in the short run, but would require a substantial fiscal commitment to job training, counseling, child care, and health benefits: "Realistically, there's no other way to transform a young woman with little or no work history, few if any occupational skills, and several young children into a self-sufficient member of society."

Cuomo observes that our current dilemmas will not be solved by mindless budget-cutting. "We need to strengthen ourselves with fiscal restraint, not throttle ourselves with fiscal strangulation." He advocates approaching deficit reduction in a "realistic and sensible way," reallocating funds to favor "programs to meet our needs, not our wants," maintaining essential investment in infrastructure and human resources—and forgetting about tax cuts (including President Bill Clinton's).

It is clear throughout that Cuomo is willing to discuss change where it is truly needed; this is no mere replaying of "Happy Days Are Here Again." But he refuses to view the items in the Republicans' poll-driven agenda piecemeal, without an exploration of their interconnections, their long-term implications, and their impact on society. Here his accumulated wisdom as a governor—a New York governor—is most valuable.

The author also brings to bear his rich personal background—his Catholicism and his immigrant parents' struggle against prejudice and the Depression, fighting for a better break. At least since the *Diaries*, Cuomo has often referred to the body politic as a "family," in which we are "all in this together"—the antithesis of the compassionless, hyper-individualistic contract. Not a trendy concept and, it must be added, not one easily translated into political action and legislation.

Cuomo does not offer us a programmatic alternative. Despite the occasional suggestion for practical action, his real purposes in writing appear to have been to give us a wake-up call about what the Republicans are proposing and to help create a framework in which problems and policies can be debated sensibly. □

James Duffy *is a writer and former lawyer living in New York. He is the author of* Domestic Affairs: American Programs and Priorities.

THE ALLURING FACE OF EVIL

Albert Speer
His Battle with the Truth
Gitta Sereny
Knopf, $35, 757 pp.

Donald H. Vish

The face of evil is the face of Dorian Gray: attractive, alluring, fascinating, and likable. Gitta Sereny, in the first line of this impressive book, says of Albert Speer: he was a man "I knew well and grew to like." That's the way evil is—likable, alluring, capable of great charm. And if we are to believe the people around Adolph Hitler, evil is also invisible. No one sees it or even suspects it. Only its results, like Dorian Gray's portrait, reveal its grotesqueness.

Albert Speer was Hitler's architect. Later he served as minister of armaments and war production where he displayed his talent as the organizational genius of the Third Reich. An aristocrat, he described his wife Margaret to his daughter Hilde as a peasant who brought "an infusion of stable stock" to his genetic legacy. Speer describes himself as Hitler's friend and an "unpolitical architect." At the Nuremberg trials, he accepted vicarious guilt for Hitler's crimes, but claimed he knew little or nothing of the details. He steadfastly denied any knowledge of the Final Solution. When Speer was sentenced to twenty years for conscripting slave labor, many were shocked that he wasn't hanged—the fate of his subordinate Fritz Sauckel, who worked under

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his direction. According to the French pastor, Georges Casalais, the prison chaplain, Speer arrived at Spandau prison (1946) a tortured man and became the "most repentant." Released from prison in 1966, the same year his book *Inside the Third Reich* was published, Speer died in 1981.

The principal aim of Sereny's book is to understand Speer; to place in context the evil crimes against humanity to which this likable "man of excellence" made himself a part. Sereny writes: "...I felt neither the Nuremberg trial nor [Speer's] book told us...how a man of such quality could become not immoral, not amoral but, somehow infinitely worse, morally extinguished."

Speer himself provides some clues. He suggests that Sereny study charisma, "the most dangerous quality there is." He introduces her to the German word *horig* to describe a wide range of emotions from servility to passivity that Hitler evoked in others through his hypnotic charisma and charm. Of Speer's own personal weakness, he tells his seventeen-year-old daughter Hilde, who wrote to him in 1953 and asked him to explain himself, that he enjoyed living in the "aura of reflected glory" and found Hitler to be a "deeply exciting" man who conveyed to the people that he "loved us." In his last book, *Infiltrations* (1979), Speer admits burying himself in his work in "an unconscious effort" to anesthetize his conscience.

In the "Spandau draft" of *Inside the Third Reich*, Speer confesses to his vaulting ambition which would lead him to sell his soul for the commission to create a great building. Hitler would become his Mephistopheles. Speer's colleague, Willie Schelkes, told Sereny he doubts ambition alone accounts for Speer's "total absorption" in his work (which had never so engaged him before) and posits that Speer's complete fascination with the challenge of his job and his need to validate Hitler's faith in him are the keys to understanding his moral flaws. In Sereny's view, Speer's and Schelkes's explanations are both correct. In 1975, a psychoanalyst advanced the theory that Hitler and Speer shared a homoerotic (not homosexual) love for each other. Hitler was for Speer the approving father he never had. Speer was to Hitler the pure-blooded, aristocratic architect he would like to have been. Asked about this thesis, Speer told Sereny "it came closest to the truth." Sereny herself concludes that Speer's moral corruption was rooted in his emotional attachment to Hitler, which was nurtured by his success and driven by his dependence on Hitler.

In attempting to understand Speer, Sereny chronicles a farrago of horrific Nazi crimes, premeditated and planned with scientific precision, ranging from systematic killings of mental patients to industrialized genocide. All told, Sereny thinks that 12 to 20 million people were murdered by the Nazis. Of the 6 million Jews killed, two-thirds were women and children. Here is a scale of evil that even Dante failed to imagine.

Unlike glory, evil cannot be visualized on a grand scale—it is too abstract. Only when reduced to a human scale can its frightful *mien* be grasped. Hartley (now Lord) Shawcross, Britain's chief prosecutor, did this at Nuremberg when he described the systematic execution of Jews in small groups of twenty—each group shot to death. Among one group described by Hartley is a family of eight, including an infant, a grandmother, two parents, and a ten-year-old boy comforted by his grandfather—all are naked, all are neatly positioned behind the corpses of the group that went before; all are cut down by a single Tommy gun resting on the knee of a single soldier who smokes a cigarette as the next wave is being readied. Speer would say thirty years later he was devastated by Hartley's account which "haunts me to this day." What Sir Hartley's description did for Speer, Speer's own story does for the reader: reveals the face of evil as a human face which devastates and haunts us.

Sereny's arrangement of quotes and use of the language from official documents is chilling. She is a master of letting the story tell itself. While her comments and observations are there when needed, much of the story comes from the mouths of witnesses and official documents. Sereny's prose is clin-

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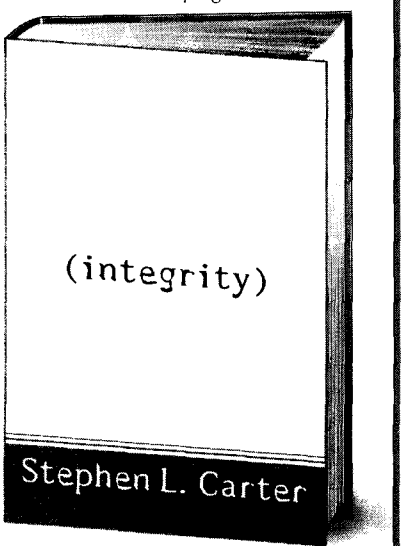

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ical, detached, and her story is relentless. From time to time, she digresses, giving the reader background information which proves relevant to understanding Speer and the milieu in which he functioned.

While Sereny's book reflects the face of Albert Speer, it is also a mirror that projects the image of Adolf Hitler and the faces of all those who saw nothing and suspected nothing. □

Donald H. Vish *is a lawyer and free-lance writer in Louisville, Kentucky. He moderates an on-line political discussion forum for Lexis Counsel Connect.*

A WRITER'S LONG LAMENT

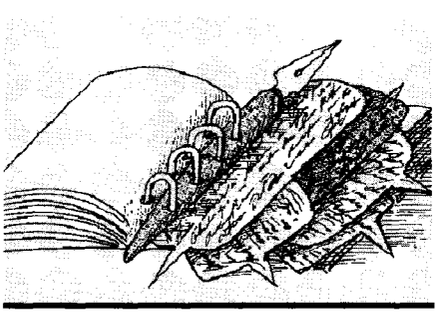
The Diaries of Dawn Powell
Edited and with an introduction by Tim Page
Steerforth Press, $32, 512 pp.

Suzanne Keen

The author of fifteen novels, including the recently re-issued Vintage editions of *Angels on Toast*, *The Wicked Pavilion*, and *The Golden Spur*, Dawn Powell (1897-1965) would laugh sardonically at the prospect of her posthumous revival. Like many women writers whose work has been rediscovered, Powell was compelled to employ her gift to earn money. Her husband worked, but he contributed only erratically to the maintenance of the household and to the costs of caring for their mentally disabled son. Perpetually in debt, and incapable of living within her fluctuating means, Powell wrote her stories, reviews, magazine features, plays, and novels with an eye to the earnings that would allow her to avert eviction, placate the bankers and the IRS, and stave off the bailiffs. Though she depended upon sales of short stories to women's magazines, Powell never compromised her satirist's vision of American manners by pandering to a popular audience. In truth, she may not have known how to.

The characters she describes as gay, witty, and engaging, strike her contemporaries as miserable, desperate wretches, or so she often records in her diary. Again and again Powell insists that middle-class readers, even middle-class Bohemian readers, cannot tolerate humor based on the exposure of the foibles of their kind. She has little sympathy for conventional pieties. Though she stayed married for forty-two years to a sarcastic, out-of-control alcoholic, and constantly endeavored to improve the life of her brain-damaged son Jojo, her true sentiment comes through in her diary: "Any barroom brawl is better," she writes, "than the persistent pinpricks of the happy little family."

In her diaries Powell spills out her frustration at the friends and family members who distract her from her work, as if their demands, and not her chronic drinking and depression, most grievously interfere with her productivity. Powell has little patience with those who believe in their myths of self-presentation, and her diaries demolish the self-styled Hostess, Patron of the Arts, Prescient Publisher, and Successful Author. Yet two seductive myths—of the woman writer's thwarting by daily life; and the unappreciated author's destruction by misunderstanding and neglect—undergird Powell's presentation of her own woes.



I do not mean to suggest that Powell's difficulties were imaginary. Indeed, she endured a miserable childhood and suffered throughout her adult life from what seems like a bipolar disorder. She struggled with a weight problem. Subject to a variety of afflictions, she had surgery on more than one occasion before her death of cancer (ironically, her wasting disease finally made her slim). Her drinking cannot have helped much. Yet Powell's frequent ranting about the burden of home and family, and her melancholy about low sales figures, indifferent publishers, and uncomprehending reviews ought not to obscure the fact that she had, by any measure, a successful career for a serious literary novelist. Before her death the American Academy of Arts and Letters honored her for her lifelong achievement in literature. Nor, I am compelled to say, should Powell's complaints disguise the fact that she never had to get an ordinary job, always enjoyed a lively social life, frequently went to plays, and never had to clean her own apartment.

Evaluating a diary comes perilously close to judging a person, and I feel uneasy about the fact that I disapprove of some of what I see in the Dawn Powell of the diaries. I wince when she kites yet another check or "draws a blank" (drinks so much that she can't remember what she did or said). I am not sure that Tim Page makes the right choice when he deletes the entries written "in what was clearly a state of intoxication," because, in his view, Powell would not "want incoherent first drafts published to the world." It's hard to know whether Powell would have wanted to be cleaned up in this way, since she writes with such scorn of the posthumous reinvention of writers (Dos Passos, F. Scott Fitzgerald) by critics, biographers, and friends.

Yet if Page intends to protect Powell, he goes only so far. He retains the caustic remarks Powell makes about her friends, and the cutting criticism of her rivals, since one of the attractions of a private journal made public ostensibly lies in its uncensored opinions. What fun to see the unappreciated genius put Hemingway in his place! How hard it is to have to chat with the patron who

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pays your way! How strange that people like the work of Katherine Anne Porter and Mary McCarthy and Eudora Welty! It seems to me that omitting, in the 25 percent of the diaries obscured from view, the unedited and perhaps unpleasant drunken passages makes it harder to see the anguish that often motivates Powell's vituperative outbursts.

Diaries give readers a false sense of intimacy. In response to reading Virginia Woolf's diary, Powell writes, "In diaries, revealing the innermost soul, the entries stop when anything interesting happens or whenever the writer is happy." While Powell's diary often records her sudden awakening into a happy mood, and recounts the good days of writing (with their optimistic predictions of good sales and reviews), the preponderance of entries show her worried, harried, jealous, or hurt. Yet I imagine that she had other feelings that do not make it onto the page, but expend themselves in buoying her up. We catch glimpses of Powell's quirky sense of humor in the odd scenes and overheard conversations she collects, and we hear in her epigrammatic pronouncements a comic's control of tone: "All my life seems to have been spent killing geese that lay golden eggs and it's a fine decent sport...."

Readers interested in the New York literary scene of the thirties, forties, and fifties will find familiar names in many of Powell's anecdotes, and Tim Page's edition of the diary includes a very helpful appendix describing the individuals, famous and obscure, to whom Powell refers. His footnotes identify the stories and novels when Powell alludes to them without their titles, or under working titles. A separate chronology of the major events of Powell's life, including dates of publication, would have been handy, but overall Page has produced a book that should be useful to students of Powell's writing, as well as completely accessible to readers interested in an engrossing, if painful account of a writer's life. □

Suzanne Keen, *a frequent* Commonweal *contributor, teaches English at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia.*

IN BRIEF

Poets' Book of Psalms

Laurance Wieder, compiler and editor

HarperSanFrancisco, $25, 311 pp.

Ralph Thibodeau

If the new translation of the psalms by the International Commission on English (*The Psalter*, Liturgy Training Publications) errs on the side of brevity (*see* my review, November 17, 1995), the *Poets' Book of Psalms* errs on the side of logorrhea: most of the transcriptions are longer by half than the psalms in the King James Bible, on which they are based.

These psalms were composed, for the most part, by post-Reformation Protestant aristocrats, lay and clerical, who not only had plenty of time on their hands, but who followed the Protestant principle of private interpretation. Almost all are strictly metrical, overwhelmingly iambic pentameter, with a few other kinds of poetic feet and meters.

There are too few settings by well-known poets: Milton (five), Coleridge (one), Francis Bacon (three), Robert Burns (one). Sir Philip Sidney is there, and his sister, Mary Sidney Herbert, who between them account for thirty-nine of the psalms. Finally, where no suitable work could be found, the gaps are filled by fifteen very contemporary settings composed by Laurance Wieder, editor and compiler (from his complete psalter), and six by Philip Rosenberg, former editor-in-chief of the Jewish Publication Society. These contemporary works are, in general, the most interesting in the book.

This is not to deprecate Wieder's labor of love. He has done us a favor by resurrecting the names and words of long-forgotten men like Miles Coverdale, the Puritan preacher who made the first English translation of the Bible; P. Hately Waddell, who made the first translation into Scottish (and whose psalms here are best taken wi' a wee dram of the gude Scotch); and Thomas Campion, unknown but to madrigal singers. Special attention should also be paid to Christopher Smart, with his extensive vocabulary and unusual rhymes (perdition, contrition; conjunction, compunction [Ps. 35]; essential, prudential; flagitious , pernicious [Ps. 49]; circumcision, derision; voracious, rapacious [Ps. 79]).

Thomas Carew's imaginative verses, "Good God, unlock thy magazines/of mercy and forgive my sins; Even from my birth I did begin/With mother's milk to suck in sin" (Ps. 35) are memorable, as are Henry Howard's: "Whose glutton cheeks sloth feeds so fat as scant their eyes be seen" (Ps. 73).

This collection of the psalms offers good layout, with plenty of white space on the pages; but to be honest, I would have settled for less white space and larger type. □

Ralph Thibodeau *is professor emeritus of music and humanities at Del Mar College, Corpus Christi, Texas.*

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Lawrence S. Cunningham

Books on monasticism are a particular weakness of mine, so it was with pleasure that I read this history of Camaldoli, translated from the Italian. Camaldoli is a favorite tourist destination for, mainly, Italian visitors who love coming to the pristine forests (once maintained by the monks but now part of the state patrimony) to visit the lower church complex with its beautiful monastic pharmacy and to look higher to see the collection of monastic hermitages where the Camaldolese monks, since the eleventh century, have lived. The Camaldolese, in fact, follow the Rule of Saint Benedict but have found enough flexibility in it to allow for both the cenobitic and eremitical life.

Camaldoli: A Journey into Its History and Spirituality,
by Lino Vigilucci,
Source Books Hermitage Books, $11, 180 pp.

Vigilucci, himself a Camaldolese monk for over fifty-five years, provides the reader with an historical account of the order from its origins in the reforming impulses of Saints Romuald and Peter Damian through its somewhat tortured institutional history down to the present. Although the Camaldolese have always been a relatively small order they have contributed great luminaries to the church. Among their more illustrious members: Guido of Arezzo, who devised the musical notation (do/re/mi) we still use today; Gratian, whose *Decretum* became the basis for canon law; the fifteenth-century Renaissance painter, Lorenzo Monaco; the enormously gifted humanist monk Ambrogio Traversari; and Nichlas Malerbi who, in the fifteenth century, published the first full Italian translation of the Bible. The author does not mention it but we might also note that the late Bede Griffiths lived as a Camaldolese monk at his Christian ashram in India.

Camaldoli, in short, is a tidy compendium about a religious order that has an almost millennial history in the church. What other religious order can brag of having three of its members named by Dante in the *Paradiso* (Gratian, Peter Damian, and Romuald)? The subtitle promises both history and spirituality. In truth, we get more of the former and less of the latter. It would have been good to have had more information about actual Camaldolese life today; things as simple as their horarium or, more pertinently, something about the ecumenical and interreligious dimensions of their witness as Christian contemplatives. The book could also use a bibliography (as well as an index!) for further readings. Most of the footnotes cite sources not easily available for the average reader.

The worldwise success of a CD of Gregorian music sung by some Benedictine monks from Spain is a phenomenon I find most puzzling: was it a symptom of a new interest in spirituality or another sign of the popularity of New Age religion? I must confess that I find Gregorian music a burden to listen to although a pleasure to sing when the liturgical opportunities afford themselves. Chant, after all, is a musical vehicle best understood in use and not as an aesthetic artifact to be experienced in a passive fashion.

The Music of Silence,
by David Steindl-Rast, O.S.B.,
HarperSan Francisco, $15, 122 pp.

Be that as it may, David Steindl-Rast has written a small book which pays a passing tribute to Gregorian music in order to meditate more fully on the liturgical offices sung, mainly, in a monastic setting. He meditates on the traditional hours from vigils to compline, with a concluding chapter on the equally traditional Great Silence which ends the monastic day. It so happens that I read this slight book while staying at a Cistercian monastery following those hours, so the book had a special resonance and context for me.

Steindl-Rast uses the hours to make larger points. Nightly vigils allow him to muse over the relationship of night to contemplation, while the morning prayer of lauds is a time of hope as the sun makes its first appearance. The "little" hour of sext at midday triggers a meditation on food and also the temptation to succumb to the "noonday devil" of ennui and boredom (the monastic *accedia*).

This is a book not to be read as a whole; it is better appreciated by reading its chapters at the appropriate hours of the daily cycle. There is a lot of compressed wisdom in these meditations which should provide nourishment for those who pray the hours and might encourage those who do not to at least begin with morning and evening prayer.

One interesting source for some of these meditations consists of citations of poems written by Rilke inspired by the monastic office. That was a new discovery for me, so now I can add those poems to those of Auden (*Horae Canonicae*) and Merton (*Hagia Sophia*) who, like Eliot in the *Quartets*, found inspiration in the ancient round of the sevenfold praise of God.

Paul Mommaers is well-known in the scholarly world as the leading interpretor of the Flemish medieval mystic, Jan Van Ruusbroec (1298-1381). After some lecture tours in the Far East, Mommaers had the very good idea of comparing the mysticism of Ruusbroec with that of Buddhist mysticism by employing the following method: he would set out as clearly as he could Ruusbroec's vocabulary, thought patterns, and theology in chapters which would alternate, in dialogical fashion, with similar chapters written from the side of Buddhist doctrine and language. Unable to get a Buddhist scholar to undertake the task, he called on Jan Van Bragt, who has spent many years in Japan as a professor at Nanzan University (in Nagoya) with a

Mysticism: Buddhism and Christian,
by Paul Mommaers and
Jan Van Bragt,
Continuum, $24.95, 302 pp.

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distinguished publication record on Japanese Buddhism and other studies in Far Eastern religion.

I am too inexpert in matters Buddhist to evaluate how accurately Van Bragt makes the Buddhist case. What does seem to be crystal clear, however, is that the (too) many popular attempts to harmonize Buddhist and Christian mysticism will appear slickly facile to anyone who engages this book with seriousness. Readers will soon see, as they follow the dialogue, that the presuppositions of Christian and Buddhist metaphysics are quite different. Christianity's God, from which the whole notion of the doctrines of creation and providence derive, seems antagonistic to the Buddhist insistence on an Absolute as an ultimate nothingness or emptiness into which all differentiated beings eventually dissolve.

Our authors face up to these challenges (and similar problems of grace, the meaning of the "I," and the Incarnation) with what appears to this nonexpert in matters Buddhist to be fairness and a concern for a correct explication of the matter. I was more interested in Mommaers's exposition of Ruusbroec's mystical theology (one could read those chapters alone and learn much), but it was instructive to read the Buddhist chapters if only to learn how arduous the work of comparative theology can be.

Mysticism: Buddhism and Christian is not a book to be read with one eye on the television set. Time and patience are required. This is a serious work of scholarship and commitment to interreligious dialogue; those who work through it will find their efforts repaid in full. It has made me serious about going back again to Ruusbroec's writings (ably translated by James Wiseman in the Paulist "Classics of Western Spirituality") helped by the able exegesis and commentary of Mommaers's fine work here.

Beatrice Bruteau's book makes a nice contrast with the Mommaers/Van Bragt volume because her work, based on secondary literature in English and targeted to the more popular market in spirituality, moves swiftly through the Christian encounter with the East, by which Bruteau means not only Buddhism but Hinduism.

In a review this short I would not want to comment extensively on the quick elision from Oriental practices to Christian

What We Can Learn from the East,
by Beatrice Bruteau,
Crossroad, $11.95, 126 pp.

ones which Bruteau sketches, but my suspicion is that scholars in this area would find some of these transitions problematic. I will content myself in outlining what I do think one can "learn" from the East using some of Bruteau's ideas.

The first lesson would be on the Eastern insistence on experience as it comes from discipline. God is not an idea or concept to be "thought of," but the center of reality which ought to be experienced. This experience comes from what the Hindu tradition calls *yoga*, a Sanskrit word which comes to us in English as *yoke* but which in our religious vocabulary might be better called *ascesis*—i.e. "training"—a term to be understood in a wide sense. The goal of yoga is to understand the authentic self and in that understanding to know the nature of ultimate reality. I have already noted that the problem of the self is understood quite differently in East and West and the difference cannot be simply glossed over. I still think that some of the best writing on the nature of the self is to be found in the opening chapters of Thomas Merton's *New Seeds of Contemplation*.

Beatrice Bruteau wants to show that the East has much to teach us and with that thesis I would have no quarrel. What I would point out, however, is that the points of contact between these two traditions are not as simple as a schematic book of this sort would lead us to believe. It is for that reason that Mommaers and Van Bragt is so valuable; it helps us keep in check the somewhat unexamined optimism of comparative books like that of Beatrice Bruteau.

The Life of the Holy Hildegard,
translated by James McGrath,
Liturgical Press, $11.95, 134 pp.

Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) has been the subject of intense interest over the past generation. A prolific author, letter writer, preacher, natural scientist, mystic, composer, and artist, Hildegard

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has been the subject of superb scholarly studies (notably, in English, by Sabina Flanagan and Barbara Newman); her works are becoming available in English; and her music is being recorded for an ever widening and appreciative audience.

In 1968 a German Benedictine (Adelgundis Fuhrkotter) translated into German the earliest *Vita* of the saint written by the monks Gottfried and Theodoric. It is from that German translation that this English version is based. The text includes a longish introduction, the *Vita* itself, and both topical and scriptural indices. As such the volume is a useful, if minor, addition to the literature in English on this remarkable woman. However, the translator/editors of this edition did only half the job. The "sources and literature" at the end do not include any of the now vast literature available in English; only German titles are cited. Were someone to pick up this volume they would not know, for example, that *Scivias* is available in English, including the first volume of her letters; that her music is available; that fine scholarly studies have appeared, etc. In short, we have the medieval *Vita* but no hints for the English-reading public that there is much more that could be learned about the person who was called the "Sybil of the Rhine."

The number of religious communities founded by the leaders of the seventeenth-century "French School" of spirituality is impressive. Among those

The French School of Spirituality: An Introduction and Reader,
by Raymond Deville,
Duquesne University Press, $22.50, 289 pp.

communities would be the Sulpicians, Eudists, Oratorians, Montforts, Christian Brothers, Vincentians, Daughters of Wisdom, as well as those innumerable congregations of religious sisters who drew inspiration from the French School like the Spiritans and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. In addition, that fecund period of the late sixteenth and seventeenth century was the beneficiary of the now classic work of Henri Bremond.

This volume, conceived as a source book for those who wish to rediscover the roots of their own congregation's spiritual charisma, follows a dual track. It provides a short biographical sketch of the four leading figures of the period (Berulle, Condren, Olier, Eudes), as well as other figures like John Baptist de la Salle, Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort, and a separate chapter on the women of the period (for example, Marie de l'Incarnation). And it provides excerpts of their writings.

This is a fecund period in the history of spirituality not only because of the impetus that its leading figures gave to church renewal but because many of its themes, especially in Christology and the connections between spirituality and liturgy, still bear close examination. There are signs that this period is undergoing a renaissance of study. We have recently had a fine dissertation done on Berulle here at Notre Dame; William Thompson (himself at Duquesne) has produced an excellent volume of Berulle's writings for the Paulist series on spiritual classics; and I recently discovered that the Evangelical scholar at Oxford, Alistair McGrath, is doing a study of Berulle as a locus for a spirituality tailored for Evangelicals.

This compact volume will find a natural home among those whose congregations find their roots in this period, but others, interested in the history of spirituality, will also find it a welcome volume.

Near the conclusion of his book, Father Hennelly says that readers might well feel like they have gone around the world in eighty days. Well, not quite but this useful *vade mecum* of liberation theologies does survey recent writings produced, *inter alia*, by Latin Americans, Africans, Asians, Hispanics, and black Americans as well as a rapid summary of ecotheologies and recent discussions about the uniqueness of Christ and the world religions. This is a theological world with which Hennelly is quite familiar, not at all disinterested, and about which he has written abundantly.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* acts as if liberation theologies (the plural is appropriate) never existed while neoconservative commentators now assure us that their day is over. It is, however, an incontestable fact that liberation theologies have not only had a shaping influence on the church but the liberationists have framed issues in such a manner that their questions become unavoidable. The

Liberation Theologies: The Global Pursuit Of Justice,
By Alfred T. Hennelly, S.J.
Twenty-Third Publications, $19.95, 382 pp.

methodologies that they favor are, in one way or another, a shaping influence on how theology is done. The liberation theologians have brought history and experience to the fore of theological reflection.

Hennelly's work is not a constructive theology, nor is it even a comprehensive history of liberation theology; it is rather a horizon tour of the main writers, their significant works, the issues that they raise, and the perspective(s) from which they raise those issues. The latter, I think, is the most interesting question, for what the liberationists have in common is the desire to reflect theologically from a quite specific and historically circumscribed situation: What does the gospel mean in the Buddhist world of Sri Lanka (A. Pieris)? Is there a way of holding up Christ, the Alpha and Omega, that is true to the culture(s) of Africa (Benezet Buzo)? How does an Hispanic-American Catholic woman define her place in the light of her culture (Maria Pilar Aquino)?

It was the great insight of Gustavo Gutierrez, the veteran liberation theologian (and one of the most intellectually insightful) to see that theology would be radically different if it were written in the slums of Lima and not in the seminar rooms of Tübingen. One of the reasons why Hennelly could subtitle his work "The Global Pursuit of Justice" is that what all these theologians have in common is a sense that there are a lot of people out there who do not share in the common goods of the earth. The best of the liberation theologians (Hennelly would do well to chasten some of the overheated rhetoric and special pleading of some of them) resist the temptation to provide solutions to these great

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problems, but they see it as a fundamental duty to do, in the words of Richard McCormick quoted by Hennelly, what the Christian tradition does best: to be "more a value raiser than a problem solver."

By my estimation, there are about five linear feet of liberation theology volumes here in my study. What Hennelly has done is give us a roadmap to work our way through the vast outpouring of those writers who think theologically in places as distant (from us) as El Salvador, Korea, the Philippines, Africa, and Sri Lanka. Each chapter of the book has a suggested reading list as well as discussion questions. A good index and bibliography also are provided. It is a user-friendly work which should find a useful place in a classroom setting. □

Lawrence S. Cunningham *is chair of the department and teaches theology at the University of Notre Dame.*

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

came man." Over the years many holy women and men teachers have led me to understand that when God became man, he became human and took on flesh like mine in order to save me. But now Michael Novak appears to retranslate the familiar words into something strikingly different: "He became *male*." He explains that "presumably, God had a point in becoming incarnate as a male." That point: "The fierce warrior-male was humbled and taught instead to be a gentle man."

Novak concludes his argument without any mention of what God had in mind for women in his saving plan. I am left to draw one of two conclusions. Either women don't need saving or women are saved through their men—their husbands, sons, fathers, and pastors. The implications are tremendous. We women are free to go home, clear our calendars, close our purses, and leave the church to the men.

But I and many women will choose a different response. We will take heart from Elizabeth Johnson, who writes that women are icons of Christ and resemble him "in terms of a common humanity and participation in divine grace." Out of loyalty to the church we love, the gospel of Jesus, and the great tradition in which we were raised, we will act in accord with our consciences and speak the truth plainly. The truth is that God took on flesh to save both me *and* Michael Novak.

JOSIE SETZLER
Fremont, Ohio

Gender matters

In *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*, all the pope is really saying is that, in spite of agreed-upon legal equality, there are still two sexes in the human species, and that this can make a difference, not only biologically, as in child-bearing, but also liturgically, as in who can preside at the Eucharistic celebration.

Catholics have commonly referred to the ordained priest as an *alter Christus*, another Christ. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (par. 1548) puts it thus: "In the ecclesial service of the ordained minister, it is Christ himself who is present to his church, as head of his body, shepherd of the flock, high priest of the redemptive sacrifice, teacher of truth. This is what the church means by saying that the priest, by virtue of the sacrament of holy orders, acts *in persona Christi capitis* (in the person of Christ the head)." No one questions that Jesus Christ was a male. Most Catholics would be greatly surprised to see a woman representing Christ as celebrant at the eucharistic sacrifice, the preeminent function of the priest.

As mothers and teachers, women have long been principal agents in communicating the faith to new generations. As for authority or "power" in the church, the day may come when women may serve in many diocesan and Roman curial offices. In some places that is already the case.

EUGENE DEHNER, O.S.B.
Atchison, Kans.

Watch your gender

Responding to recent Vatican declarations on women's ordination, Francis X. Murphy, C.SS.R. [January 26], offers the sage counsel that "theologians and polemicists would be well advised to await the arrival of a pontiff as strong-willed and theologically competent as Wojtyla to discover

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whether 'what a pope can do a pope can undo.'" I would edit that well-worn adage as follows: "What a pope can do she can undo."

BROTHER THOMAS MORE PAGE, C.F.X.
Washington, D.C.

May he be condigned

Notwithstanding its complimentary assertions, Joseph Komonchak's review [January 26] of *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism* reminds me of John's account (1:46) of Nathaniel's introduction to Jesus: "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" To which Philip replied, "Come, see for yourself."

Komonchak came but what he saw, and did not see, is breathtaking. Item: "Among American biblical scholars, John L. McKenzie is in but not Bruce Vawter." Cf. p. 1298 and the thirteen-line entry on Vawter. Item: "Opus Dei is here, but not Communione [*sic*] e Liberazione." *See* p. 341 and the article by Michael Waldstein entitled "Comunione e Liberazione." Item: "The YMCA and the YWCA have brief entries but not the CYO." *See* pp. 288-289 for the entry entitled "Catholic Youth Organization." Item: The YCW ("Young Christian Workers") is not present. Strictly, yes. But *see* p. 226 for the entry on Joseph Cardijn, their founder, as well as p. 708 for the piece on the Jocists. Item: "Argentina might feel slighted at getting only eight lines, but Brazil gets none." *See* p. 194, where Brazil gets twenty-four lines.

What is responsible for these types of glaring boo-boos? "Can anything good come from Notre Dame?" Or was it just sloppy work? In either case a condign penance (the notion of condignity is covered, by the way, on p. 344) is appropriate. I suggest strongly positive PR when Komonchak meets potential buyers of the volume.

RICHARD A. MCCORMICK, S.J.
Notre Dame, Ind.

The writer is John A. O'Brien Professor of Christian Ethics at the University of Notre Dame.

The reviewer replies:

I should be pleased to have Father McCormick as a confessor if condign penance is all he would impose upon me for the faults he has noted in my review. *Mea culpa* is *maxima* for the first two and the last one, but remains, if lesser, for the others as well, and I am not comforted that the great majority of my observations receive no censure. I apologize and will consider whether "supererogation, works of" (p. 1231) are not called for.

As for where the responsibility lies: I choose "sloppy work," to explain which in these few cases would approach too closely the kind of rationalization with which confessors may rightly be impatient. The application of the biblical text (I suspect that Father McCormick would not want us to read on to Jn 1:47), with its easy passage from Nazareth to Notre Dame, perhaps confirms the point I tried playfully to make to my friends in South Bend.

JOSEPH A. KOMONCHAK

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RACE & ANGER

Cliff Thompson

In June 1983, when I was between my sophomore and junior years of college and was in search of summer work, I called a number listed in the newspaper and made an appointment to interview for a sales job. I put on my best suit, left my mother's house in Northeast Washington, D.C., and trekked to suburban Maryland, where I discovered that I had come to a group orientation rather than an interview.

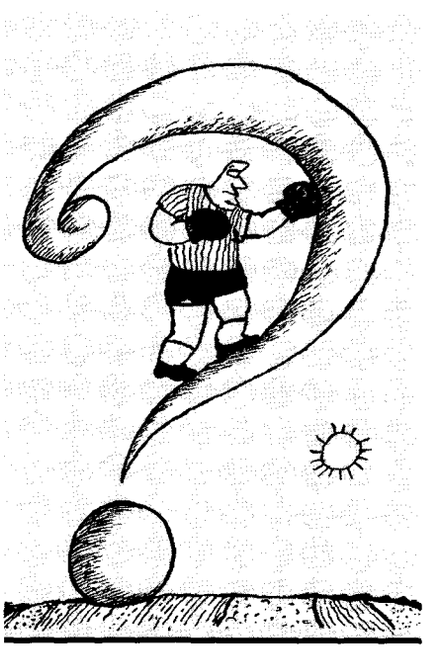
Ten or twelve of us, all dressed as if for church, sat at a rectangular table and listened as a trim, smooth-voiced, middle-aged man gave us the lowdown on selling Cutco knives. When he had finished his talk, which was sprinkled with witty asides and self-deprecating humor, the man passed out applications. I was about half-way through mine when he summoned me to a separate room. In a pleasant tone, he asked me questions based on the part of the application I'd completed. Beyond that, my memory of the exchange becomes fuzzy. I know he told me *something* of such an innocuous, inoffensive nature that I not only had trouble remembering it later but failed to question what lay behind it as he spoke. Not until I had left the office, without having completed my application, was I struck by why I had been led to do so: Of the dozen or so people seated at the rectangular table, I was the only African-American.

I cannot, and may never be able to, recall that incident without feeling acute shame at my past naiveté and also impotent rage at the racism—breathed in like air by all of us each day—that made the incident possible. Of course, as an example of racial oppression, the story doesn't rate very high. But that is my point.

I have moments, as I believe every member of a minority group does, when my consciousness rises above the level of daily concerns, career aspirations, etc., when I look at the world not through the lens of fatherhood, husbandhood, or employeehood, but see with an unobstructed view. And then I think, with an anger that practically chokes me: *This is the world I live in?*

Still, I'm less interested in anger than in how to deal with it. When one feels choked by it, the natural reaction is to want to do a little choking of one's own; or, failing that, to label as devils those who have created the situation, *and all who look like them*. Neither response, however, fits my own nature. I don't have the stomach for the first, and my intellect, which provides me with a knowledge of the variety of human attitudes within any given group, won't permit the second. This leaves me in a bind. What do I do with my feelings?

The key may be my intellect—puzzling in itself, since its argument is too strong to allow me to condemn white people as a group, yet its influence is too weak to prevent that impulse in me. It would seem to require modification: either strengthening, so that it can calm me down; or weakening, so that I can act on my hostile urges.



Assume that a stronger intellect is the better course. Being the best teacher, experience ought to strengthen that portion of me that rejects a Nation-of-Islam-style condemnation of white people—because by having practiced that rejection, I would know *firsthand* its folly and ugliness. Two of the writers I most admire, the black essayists Stanley Crouch and Shelby Steele, are quite eloquent in their denunciation of "reverse" racism, yet each admits to having passed through a separatist/black-nationalist phase before reaching a more balanced view of life. But must I experience a similar phase? For me, and others like me, it hardly seems necessary (or possible) since we are already intellectually aware of its very folly.

Besides, my anger—a reaction to racist acts—cannot be forever purged by such a method. Racism is not merely a guest in American society, it is a permanent resident: one that can be counted on to rekindle rage regularly. So, becoming a separatist might provide me with an apparent quick fix, but I would soon be back where I started, with the added problem of having compromised my principles.

The bind, then, remains: My intellect stands in the way of my acting in a hostile manner, yet my anger is eternal—as it should be. Still, anger need not consume me. If it cannot be entirely eliminated, it can be channeled; if not acted upon, acknowledged. I know there are many African-Americans like me who reject racist generalizations and want to convert their rage into a positive force. Let us talk to each other: our neighbors, co-workers, friends, and lovers, black and white; and while fighting racism, let us affirm the humanity of all people, lest our own be diminished. □

Cliff Thompson *is a fiction writer and an associate editor of* Current Biography.

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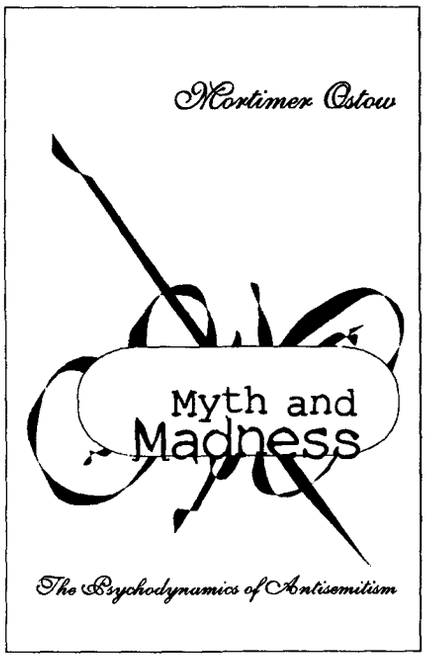

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